



# Saturn

Adam Fieled

Saturn: The First Eight Complete Print Books by Adam Fieled  
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POSIT: DUSIE PRESS, 2007

## Posit

I want  
but that's  
nothing new.

I posit  
no boundary  
between us.

I say you,  
I know you,  
I think so.

I know  
what world  
is worldly.

I know  
how death  
stays alive.

I never  
enter third  
person places.

I could  
go on  
forever.

## Come to the Point

I am that I  
that stations metaphor  
    on a boat to  
be carried across.  
that makes little  
    songs on banisters,  
which are slipped down.  
that slips down  
    antique devices,  
china cutlery & white.  
I am coming to  
    the point. I am  
come to the point.  
I am that I.

## Day Song

& this reflexivity, right now: how it bounds.  
how we are the sum total of our limitations.  
we catch glimpses. what's in the catching.  
what's beyond, behind, between: purple fear.  
bodies randomly chosen, for different reasons.  
dreams of form. charades. too bad, but  
always the knowledge, if we are lucky, of  
scattered constellations in the world. chewable.  
fragments. progress. only in patches. must. do.

## Illinois Sky

One could sink upwards into  
it, lose brown earthy stains.  
Conglomerated air-pockets,

tucked into figments, wide  
enough to lend temporality  
sense, day's square progress.

This I don't know about, this  
feeling, expanse contracted,  
sex impulse etherealized, I

can't see this w former eyes.

It is, after all, a doorstep,  
just me entering me again—

cream purse, vulval sheen.



## Lars Palm Dream

I was skulking in  
a dorm room with  
Lars Palm, who  
was chucking  
lobsters. A yellow

globule tried to  
get our goat; a wall  
started talking.  
Lars was furious.  
Some girls were

involved with us,  
as junk piled up.  
Lars threw a  
lobster at the  
yellow globule,

roaring. It was  
a pivotal moment—  
bare walls. Rubbish  
heap. Fucked  
globules. We left.

## Eyeballs

They sent a maid  
to clean Jocasta's

chamber, a stout  
ex-maenad, still

full of wine. She  
happened upon

the two eyeballs  
of Oedipus, doused

with blood, beneath  
Jocasta's dangling

feet. They were  
smooth, tender

as grapes. She  
pocketed them.

They became play-  
things for her cats.

Perhaps there is  
use for everything,

she thought, raising  
a glass to her lips;

and if I am a thief,  
who will accuse me?

## Rowdy Dream

I was slumming @  
Andrew Lundwall's.  
There was a demented  
cook called Seana  
w/ tortured ringlets.

There was a cooking  
issue, a food problem.  
I ate something.  
I stayed on the fifth  
floor, away from

rowdies on floors  
two & three. My  
Mom broke in,  
spoke of better  
food, more rowdies.

I wanted to be  
more rowdy, left  
floor five. Seana  
spoke gibberish to  
me in the kitchen.

I wasn't happy or  
unhappy; I was in  
the middle. All this  
time Andrew Lundwall  
sat on a throne on

floor one. I was  
making my way  
down there when  
I awoke— no food.  
I became rowdy.

To Bill Allegrezza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up  
from a whirlpool  
swirling down,  
but sans belief  
in signification.

"I" must say I  
w/out knowing  
how or why  
this can happen  
in language.

"I" must believe  
in my own  
existence,  
droplets stopping  
my mouth—

alone, derelict,  
"I" must come back,  
again, again,  
'til this emptiness  
is known, & shown.

## Waiting for Dawn Ananda at Dirty Frank's

in the syntax of

my vodka-tonic,

& in the neon

smoke-rings

kisses hang

before breezes

## Le Chat Noir

I pressed a frozen face  
forward into an alley off  
of Cedar St., herb blowing  
bubbles (am I too high?) in

melting head I walked &  
it was freezing & I walked  
freezing into pitch (where's  
the) blackness around a

cat leapt out & I almost  
collapsed a black cat I  
was panting & I almost  
collapsed I swear from

the cold but look a cat  
a black cat *le chat noir* oh no

**Girl with a Cigarette, Modern Painters cover, January '07**

You don't mean it, do you? You  
don't know that the blue around  
yr pupils is sky in a vice, that your  
fingers are too complicated.

Nothing shows you that shadows  
over yr neck do not account for  
over-delicacy, that shoulders  
simply squared reveal damaged

breast-matter. You smoke, not  
knowing. You take a drag, too  
picture-esque. Your pose is a  
pose, your cheekbones simply ash.

## 10:15 Saturday Night

then like how bout we give this  
thing a chance or at least not bury it  
beneath a dense layer of this could  
be anyone, we could be anyone,  
anyone could be doing this, just  
another routine, another way of  
saying hello, & goodbye just

around the corner like a dull  
dawn layered thick in creamy  
clouds, ejaculations spent



## Jessica Smith Dream

Jessica Smith was a corpse  
on a bed on a screen in front  
of me. She lay in darkness  
w an obscure head. I touched

the screen— it grew red. I  
touched her head on the screen  
& she was alive again, &  
blonde. I stepped back from

the screen, hearing her  
breathing. I felt as if I had  
performed an exorcism—  
this was holy water. I shook

through the whole thing.

## Dracula's Bride

I married into blood &  
broken necks, endless  
anemic privation, but

no regret. You see,  
hunger fills me. I like  
vampire hours (no

sleep), a blood-vessel  
pay-check, diabolical  
companionship, tag-team

seductions, guileless  
maidens about to  
be drunk.

We know what sweetness  
is in starvation. We've  
found, satiety

is death's approval stamp.  
If you crave, there is  
room left in you. If

you want, you are a  
work-in-progress—  
being finished is

a cadaver's province.  
Better to suck  
whatever comes.

# OPERA BUFA: OTOLITHS, 2007

## #1

Losing is the lugubriousness of Chopin. What's lost might be a sea shell or a tea cup or the bloody scalp of an Indian; it hardly matters. When you are lost, the heart recedes from exterior currents, too much in sync with itself, its groove vicissitudes. Each encounter, rather than revealing new rhythms, is experienced as a clangorous din, a pounding. The effect of this pounding is to push the heart deeper and deeper into pitiless darkness. The darkness is pitiless because it has no clear ending. The rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began. We find pity and it betrays us with a stray fondle. We squirm within ourselves to the sound of the Devil's opera bufa.

## #2

You may stride streets like Oskar with tin drum, cracking glass with a solid shriek, taking Madonnas hostage, assaulting exhausted nurses lying prone on shag carpets. There are nurses and nurses; some have carnations. You want to serve; your hands are still masterful.

### #3

Pluto sets Orpheus on your ass. Plucking out a minor-seventh bridge, he holds you in legato thrall. Rhythms become streams of possible shoe-lace, slugs of 3 a.m. Scotch, lust after thy neighbor's daughter, mooning on the lawn.

#### #4

The principle of sufficient reason has pinned you to a mattress and is coming inside you. You are a plantation officer after the lost war. Your cache of black carnations marks out a no-fly zone, bloody scalps of third wheels. You see how richly layered you are, but frosting is visible.

## #5

It's not funny, that you've left a body count. You're up in stiff urban trees, you've known unrest. Not that you don't harmonize with concrete; just that you mix concretely. There is recalcitrance in your Wellington boots, a blatant sell-out in your dancing; China girls approach you in dank basements.



## #6

Am I daft to see imbecility in mercy? Three men, one gesturing, address perfumes of Venus. Yes, I affirm certain deadness in disturbances of black jackets. No, I do not believe a blue sports jersey is a treasure. I have made up a song to go with the song of this chanteuse. What silly trills, love of languor, appreciation of origins of apples. The core is not to be ditched. The apple is not to be pulled.

## #7

If you were a yellow balloon in tall leaning trees, I'd be a girl in purple impaled between pillars. If you were a cup of finished ice cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon-goddess. Is the human heart a Parisian kitchen? Are lamb-chops better than avarice? Are you churned like butter from Dantescan depths? Am I warm and willful as a shop-girl's thighs, stuck with grasses to a farmer's boots? Lunatics hover on branches, pushing me down into sleep; swans at the window, watching hail fall in diagonal darts. Your railings border me, yet toss my words up into gleaming squares. Priests look back and forth, veiny hands. Shadows strike the angels from their perch. Somewhere inside is a reference.

## #8

This is all a bridge between a verse and chorus. That's how the sky exudes its musk, right before breaking down and buying a ranch. You find my earrings glamorous, and they were left by my bed by a lover who learned from porn. She was always crabby.

## #9

It's always brown-hewn burglars sending drain-you vibes through Ethernet. Not that one can internalize mind-scabs, but that the brown-minded must spread shit. What kind of tumescence gets consummated via these kinks? What ribald ruby-red jumps live from these booby traps? Nothing but antiquated horse-corsets passing murals, gun-slung brothers sprung from Rite Aid, orange vodka-eaters. I fit into this like a mentholated ciggy in a Presbyterian church, which is to say, the city has heroes ducking under awnings, semen smells in tightly packed alleys, particularities.

## #10

What does he say, the porridge-hearted victor, as troops rub ermine on his thighs? He is not only hermaphroditic, he complains of being too much like Cleopatra. He is only a bruised pear, yet words come out of him, tunes replay in his head like flies on ice cream. I am him as a fish is a bicycle but a fish on a bicycle would be too much, like Henna-dyed Shakespearean joust-a-bouts.

## #11

All minor chords are dreadful when prolonged by Valium. Not that I condescend to be anything but minor. Not that I'd give myself an A. Actually, I would, but then not every poem I like begins *Roses are red, Violets are blue*. I understand newness. I understand membranes. I understand that a bald pate does not signify superior understanding. I can't give you anything, and vice versa. Go back to the opening.

## #12

It is simply bereavement that leads us here, to these images. It is a matter of fucking upstairs, getting the maids wet. What you see is what you see, cadavers in copses, perfectly good mushrooms, a tent to shelter red-heads. Don't accuse yourself of blasphemy for marching sideways, crab-like, towards Exit signs. Any kind of soft-shoe swagger remains inappropriate. Stay where shadows press themselves in upon you. Stay with the purple riders and their sage buttons. Stay safe within danger.

### #13

O, for the strength to strip a stripper. Isn't that wanted by the forces swirling in eddies around the Delaware? Isn't that what becomes material? Not if you think one night can be micro, macro, all kinds of crows. Not if what you really want is to pick at my liver. Let's face it, you were never more than a soul-pygmy. You were a soul-gypsy by yourself, to yourself. We learn as life elongates that personal feelings about persons are not important. We learn that we are all pygmies. Your failure was in measuring yourself against ants, as if a beam and a magnifying glass could cure you. You should be so lucky.



## #14

I can't help but influence pigeons in the cream cheese. You know what I mean. When you eat something that's bigger than your head, you get messy. It's been that way since a flock of seagulls pitched tents in New Mexico. They were just camping, they said. Anyway, I detonate. I feel it is best to confess right at the beginning. What I confess is a salad at a fast-food restaurant, of which I feel dispossessed. Things go on. Things continue. It's all about systems. It's all about seagulls.

## #15

Personally, I don't care if a baseball penetrated your basement window. All I see is a framework of jagged glass. I don't much like it, nor do I consider Klonopin an appropriate substitute for Independence Day. If (on alternate Fridays) you remember to do the funky chicken, so much the better. What I want to see is you coming out of come. I want to see geysers, all-sorts, licorice, Now-and-Laters. I want to see you move past Debussy into Mozart. You know, play faster or something.

## #16

You're all out to lunch, you Amherst wafer-eaters. You forgot that Billy the Kid, unlike Christ, was not resurrected. The pictures you leave on lampposts signify low self-esteem. Your cozy brasserie is not to be bush-whacked. As for me, I have moved beyond ten-of-swords mentalities. Not that I count you out. I just don't know what bag you are zipped into. It looks not very fur-lined to me.

## #17

I don't know who my friends want. I could be a French-speaking gopher. I could grope every freckle on a red-head's behind. I could fickle myself in plaster or plastic. Of the many possibilities, I feel closest to mother's voices please-touching; concretes, red-brick wings, soaring up through Baudelaire's tendonitis. I ache with him.

## #18

I like you, yes, but it's serious, kid. Don't imagine you can hide your backyard in a magnolia tree's bark-shedding trunk. If your passion arrives in a non-Christian context, say *Thank you Buddha*. You will never lack conundrums as long as line after line after line demands to be born like a good kidney bean.

## #19

Being stalked by a sting-ray in slap-happy crematoriums is not a simple matter. Deadness develops, makes lists, checks things off. You-don't-have keeps adding up to gaggles of slugs underneath.

## #20

That night I had your heart-attack, I was alone, moon-streaked, somnolent. There is a soul-Net bigger than the one we know. There are things you can catch, Piscean, Aquarian, Scorpion. Back on that sun-glassed, sin-spattered street, back into my eager tense-ready nodding, back into that inter-connected nexus emitting blue-purple sparks over every picture in the paper, every poem in the picture, every pruned, festooned image in the poem. I've got your back.

## #21

First thing in the morning, I hear about a Mob-mad Dick wearing a black velvet hood all over Washington, stomping weedy ground in SS boots. This is a man who sings Gregorian chants as he pulls hair-trigger shit-loads from his arse. I don't connect, and my non-connection includes running four miles along the scud-less Schuylkill. I see an edgy apocalypse in each half-mile marker, a prod at each lemonade stand, a clown-class dragging tired skin across street-bones. As you grow older, oldness grows like a fungus around your extremities. Now, I sit and write this opera and it appears like a walrus or otter saying *I am that I.*



## #22

There is no place in business for me. I was born to endlessness of any kind, of the kind that breathes fire dragon gold through nostrils of untamed street-corner harmonies. Despite this fact, I like trees, I could go camping if I weren't so marshmallow soft, such a Hercules of perpetually moving inaction. Or, I could just go camp.

## #23

I can't make sense of anything anymore, not even riding the trolley past a gleaming, soot-speckled Mini-Mart in morning's ardent sunshine. Every passenger inhabits a non-Prada paradise, where what you have is simply a matter of Kool composure, fertile lassitude, flea markets and the plethora of miniscule trinkets therein. Every grainy facet floods the eye with color, but blackness, my dear, is the ground we walk on. Blackness is the door to rebirth. I want to come out and be colorless. I want to come out and give ashram orders to a meditating world. Order itself is beyond me.

## #24

I do not give a damn for any rankings, as I know preeminence is an old European myth meant to pickle pens and keyboards. I have judged myself, found myself a person, found myself not an artist but an art-is, an ink otter, a bubble-blown frog hopped up on saying personal things backwards and masked. I sing this scintillating aria not for the bull-nuts in the Peanut Gallery, but for all readers w nuts. Keep your snake-tail eating language for language-guinea pigs, keep your pug-face for the aesthete tax collecting slobber-heads. I've hewn a new key from a new, chicken-scented, turkey-basted variety of froth. I know damn well what you've hewn. Hew off.

## #25

Assuming I remain a tag-labeled individual, naught remains but to white out any yellows, apply patches of loose color to squarely composed areas, brushstroke a raw rheumy red heart, beaten like a time-rusted gong, onto each firmament that rises and sets on canvases arrayed, grey-grained. This I will do, w no uneasiness. What must be shown is mandatory as income tax.

## #26

What's between me and you is this flower-wall in a rose-fringed corner of some invisible curtained garden. I am very far away from what knowing is.

## #27

My friends and I are groping to create a science of imaginary solutions, one of which is Pepto-Bismol repeated in vats and poured over two copulating sweat-drenched animals emitting squeals in octaves. The history of popcorn is a minor third that can be squelched by intense bed-thuds. Every mattress is a major third, every home-stretch a suspended fourth, every new Kama Sutra position a bent note in the Dorian mode. There is no grey. It's wild.

## #28

I say “we,” I mean the people counting ravens. I mean the circle-minded carnival otters holding down forts. We know who we are, but are very far from knowing who planted what. I say, use the turnips to write, make a cake w teeth-pealed carrots, but save the lettuce. We should hold on to the village green until a new harrow is made, which can turn us over, on Proustian sick-beds, to enumerate levels and layers of cockroaches, clinging to life, courting Keith Richards.

## #29

There is an engraving on the corner of your left cheek, placed there by me, which speaks of dead queens, frilly shirts, stoned wanderers. What I mean is, I am capable of bestowing silver-stenciled decorations on you, and will continue to do so for as long as I can sharpen my tools along the edges of your fire escape. We have forged, in the smithy of our souls, a country recreated from borders of what was dreamed between us, rose-delicate, so much investigation. There is naught left to shimmy but little diamond-hooded imps sprung out from tips of our fingers, ground down to astral sparks when light is brought down, channeled through ritual.



### #30

Things tank, things fall apart, centers cannot hold, and the only second coming you can count on you can download for free on the Internet. I am personally involved in sun-breaks following storms, scandals of moss and weeds, kick-back payments over pots of world-weary gumbo, so much *meshigas*. What I am looking for is an arpeggio including history, a vibrato that is not quiet, an aria in the real language of men.

### #31

If you weren't so scandal-happy, I might consider depositing a ton of bricks between your carburetor and fan-belt. The fact is, darling, that my opera is not soap. All kinds of buffoonery have meaning in this microcosmic environment, like goldfish eating Trollope-reading directors of electricity. I am confident that I will not be left alone. I am also sure that the fish-monger backwards-going Polonius-type psychos will get stuck behind me. *Eat me*, I will say to them, and invite them to look, touch, fondle, grope the thin air around my queen's shins.

### #32

I have danced on pins and needles since Socrates realized semantics were a peach of a smash of a pop-tart. I have encompassed centuries, I ride in gondolas, I celebrate Lent, I have coffee with Balzac. If you want to surround me with anything but freedom, Dante has opened up a specific ring in Hades just for you. It is shaped like a wall-papered nursery. There are malicious spirits on baseball cards. You become gum.

### #33

Out there, in the wider world, automatons spit shards, bullets, videotapes, all wound to slit and reveal vulnerable redness. They are beyond laughter. The air they breathe is flesh they bite into. The beds they sleep in are nailed, and they are nailed, and consciousness becomes a loose, rusty, crud-tinged nail. I wonder that I am anxious, and laugh at myself for wondering. What place for Don Rickles in a boot-camp of the soul? *Harder, harder*, I say to myself, doing breast-stroke laps in the deep end of brine vats.

### #34

It is brave to be old so that one may become young. You can do double dismounts like a cat on pot. You can move beyond the *dead man hopping* phenomenon. When you sit in a half-lotus, your lolling tongue rests comfortably on old metaphors. Suddenly, the moon is enough. Suddenly, flowers are worth looking at, and you are a person. There is splendor in just walking around. There is air to breathe. Who knows, you might be able to stay a person for more than a moment. With luck, axioms become trees. Climb them.

### #35

I sing to her in raspy, whiskey-voiced bliss. It's a honky-tonk song with considerable tonal variation. Not far from twelve-bar blues, it's got a turnaround and a bridge, including four beats on the relative minor. You might mistake this section for *Earth Angel*, and in fact that's what she is. The city's squeal and tremor sings along with me— rev, snarl, strum. We make a Hallelujah Chorus for a new Iron Age.

### #36

I am seeing Mercury go Retrograde in a fly's anus. There is a delay in delivering my poetry to the old wooden bucket. Yet, I roll with the punches. Just yesterday I gathered geraniums to give to madmen. I ate a liver sausage sandwich, perched in grass. I found myself rooted in history. Spare me your stories of insubstantial fluff. Spare me the stale victuals, the I'm-on-top rhetoric. I have seen a caduceus in the sky, pointing to a pile of my papers. I am wanted by the FBI, and the Central Intuitive Agency. I project to the back row. Though life be a confectionary lemon, I suck it.

### #37

There is backwards masking mixed into the mix tape I sent you. Satan himself says he is himself but you need a turntable to hear it. The experience of hearing Satan's voice backwards may be absorptive for you. It was for me. I immediately fornicated with three high priestesses. I did a line of cocaine off a shag carpet, put on an Andy Gibb tee shirt, and wandered around looking for Snow Caps. I became possessed by a demon and I rose off the bed. I astral projected into the kitchen and my head was a Necco wafer.



### #38

I was a cadaver in a copse until a cop arrested me. I was a convict in a jumpsuit until I jumped bail. I was a hitchhiker under galactic moon dust until I saw the sun. I was the sun as it rose and I shone on my dead self. I was a copse under the sun. I was a convict and a copse. I was all of this until I learned that you are what you see. I was what I saw until I saw that my eyes were shut. I opened my eyes to a kind of vacancy. I opened my arms to delinquency. I do not see anything now, and it rings.

### #39

I did it to myself. I rolled down hills. I twirled in circles. I partook of strange drugs. It was on a trip of this kind that I met Sunny Jim, who claimed to have many minds. I never believed him, still don't. Why should I?

## #40

I was playing a lute in the Court of Ferdinand. I was being courtly. I was displaying all the *sprezzatura* that I could. I did not reckon that it was actually 2007. I remained strangely unaware that electricity had been discovered. I picked up a daffodil; it became a cell phone. I picked up a quill; it became a bottle of Nyquil. I realized that I was in the wrong century. I would have to live through hundreds of years to get to where I was. I would have to spontaneously regenerate. I saw my lute become a Stratocaster. I saw the court become the Bowery Ballroom. I only knew two scales, and I played them every which way. I heard deafening applause. I saw Ferdinand wearing Speedos.

## #41

I have made a habit of courting buffoons. I have listened to a British waitress ask me, *would you like a scone or a buffoon?* I have eaten scones and buffoons together, with cheese and cherry preserves. I have felt that scones and buffoons are somehow related, especially where Tennyson is concerned. I have felt Tennyson to be both a scone and a buffoon. I am ready (finally) to eat a scone alone. I no longer need buffoons in my life. I have covered *Freebird* for the last time. I am ready to be free. I am ready to cherry.

## #42

I often feel surrounded by lightweights. I frequently shine a light on their lightness, only to find blackness hidden in their cuffs. I hear them, lightweight and dark, pronouncing on the eligibility of cretins. I see them applauding a show of daft penguins. I drink with them, and they out-drink me. I talk with them, and they out-talk me. I write alone, and I have found no other way to sing. I box them simply by breathing.

### #43

There was a girl on a hill. She was shrouded by a wash of shadow. In the background, a steeple peeked through blue. There were clotted sky-arteries. Light was moving on the hill and on the girl. She remained fixed. A sound like thunder made jarring waves. She was facing me. I was floating above a different hill. The picture before me was like a face. The girl knelt where a mouth should've been.

#### #44

There I was in bed in a toy store. I had a fever. I was also a girl in the corner who wanted to get in bed with me. There was a blonde apparition, a loudmouth, pacing a bit like Patton. I felt strained from being me and also being someone else. In retrospect, it seems strange that no toys were visible. It is also curious that, in the dream, I happened to be a famous musician. No determinate ending presented itself. Patton might've become a stuffed animal, I can't remember. Something was said that meant war: *don't toy with me.*

## #45

I spotted a bluebird. I got in an amorous tussle. I saw a thousand hues, and each was differently used. *She's got soul*. I felt it was a matter of vibes. The lightweights and toy stores were behind me. The world was reduced to a back seat. The bluebird was a woman and the woman was more than just flying. Each word had a depth and a weight. Each look had a color and a shape. Each moment that passed was *on the way home*. Our sound: *pianissimo*.



## #46

What has been lost thus far? It's just tar on a highway, bound for ocean. Or, it's the migratory flight of a carrier pigeon. It is all things that move and breathe, coalesced into sound. It is Odette's tune in Swann's mind. It is octaves, repeated in a funhouse mirror until a decibel level is reached that a dog alone may hear. I am the dog that hears, the dog that conducts, the dog that puts bones on tables. The bones are all gone under a hill. The dogs are all gone under a footlight. There are no footnotes.

## #47

Here is where a climax should be: in a closet, freshly washed, on a hanger. There is a crescendo in stasis, like a Buddha-as-housemaid. So, no shattered glass in this opera.

## #48

Maria Callas smokes a post-coital cigarette. Her legs dangle over the stage's edge. She has been pounded. She, too, has left a body count. She has been on the hill. She has been a mouth, a bluebird, a curtain. *We are all purple riders*, she says, blowing smoke. *We are all tender-hearted as eunuchs, small as mix tapes*. Maria, the Devil has entered you. Things have become what they are not. The opera-goers are restless. You had better produce more than ashes. You had better throw out your stubs. It's encore time.

## #49

I follow Maria to the stage door. I walk with her through a flower-wall. *Tender hearts are made to be broken*, she says, *I want your ton of bricks*. I think that Maria is promiscuous. I think I am in bed with Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval. I think many confused thoughts. Meanwhile, Maria has taken out a caduceus. She caresses it. She calls it many names. Somehow it is attached to me. Somehow it is wired to feel what I feel. We lay in a half-lotus. We lay in dank repose. Maria has already done this. I wonder if this amounts to *La Boheme* for weirdos. Skin is our funny toy store. We buy it.

## #50

*You spent forty-seven poems looking for me, Maria says. You were talking in expansive, fluorescent, Crayola circles. All I can say is, I remember poundings and baseball cards and tons of bricks. I remember daftness and deftness disappearing. I remember gum, bruises, abusing ice cubes. I know that I had to dream an opera to really sing. I know I had to dream singing to really write. As for fluorescence, those crayons were always my favorites anyway. If the color is off, it's because my set collapsed, if not into nullity, then into plurality. I remember a city and a story. I am many stories up.*

## #51

It is left to Maria to return me to my duties. *Your song is a newly filled crescent moon*, she says, gesturing to my eyes, where notes flow into. Maria has made a hologram of herself for me. She has strapped it to my hands like cuffs. She has left me offstage, recounting when I found a way of being in tune with rows of chairs.

## #52

Am I a tired old man? Am I mysteriously young? Or is it that youth and old age both have equal leverage in song, like major and minor? Whatever stage of life has been born into me, I know now that song cannot be spared when life and death adhere. I know life and death, I know the contours of them; they are bed sheets to me. They do not wind around, but lay beneath each performance. They are the reason why buffoons must be rebuffed, why dodos must be done in. They are no kind of beggar's banquet. Adherence is my tribute to this interminable fret board, this double-stopped coil.

### #53

I am beginning an inventory. I am in possession of songs. I am in possession of labor, and love's labors lost. I am capable of experiencing Mini-Mart's. I inhabit an operatic landscape. I have loved a girl. I have also loved a Maria. I am noticing a strange poverty in richness. I am cleaning up the stage for this to happen again. I am counting on scones to butter themselves. I am haunted by remorse for missed notes. I am nonetheless proud to have escaped the flatted fifth, *el Diablo en musica*. I am lucky because the Devil paid for my stage props. I have torn up our contract. I have contacted my attorney.



## #54

The dressing room is filled with flowers. I wash off make-up, remove stage garments, congregate with various chorus members. I have moved from “I” to “we”. The opera is the story of all of our lives. When it ends, our lives may be recreated. This is possible because we know of what we consist. We are dust and dreams and druthers and so many cockroaches. No one will stop anytime soon. No one will give up rays of moon. No one will forget the feeling under footlights. Adrenaline permeates our conversations. There is an after-show party to be attended. There are hook-ups waiting for all of us.

## #55

I am walking streets, arm in arm with a woman who designs props. It feels like the first mild day in March. I give in to idleness, thinking of Maria. Memory is sweet as reality, reality is sweet as dreams, and I have learned to what extent dreams are real. They may not be solid as a cast-iron pot, but they are *enough*. I feel this strongly as I kiss Ms. Props. I feel this even more strongly as she reaches around my neck as if to throttle me. *Oh no, I think, is this when I have to start singing again?* Alas, she only wants to feel me more deeply. It is the hour of feeling, when singing must cease.

## #56

Ms. Props, jealous, wants to know about Maria. She, too, wants a ton of bricks. A song pops into my head, just a germ, and I know that another opera is beginning, as night bleeds into dawn. *Never you mind*, I say, *you are as pain-worthy as she, as precious in your meddling, as diligent in your scavenger hunt*. I feel a C chord changing to E minor, then an A minor changing to G, and I realize what Eternal Return means. It means that every fresh breath of life plants seeds that must die. It means that the death of music is the birth of tragedy that must be expressed musically. It means all this fooling around must be paid for in the oven of creation. Every kiss must be minted.

## #57

I am writing again, and losing. I am lost in a funhouse maze. I must make it a new opera or die trying. I have had lovers of the last opera, now I must find lovers of an opera to come. What will subsist from opera to opera? It is a sense that our world is out of tune, and that the artist must set it in order; a sense that the artist is, in fact, an officer in an army of puffins, and commands an elite puffin brigade; finally, the recognition that songs must be created because too much silence is composed of dust and ash. I must create a staged Underworld, to prevent the actual Underworld from pummeling my life. I must beat Pluto at his own flaccidly undulant game. I score with every chord change.

## #58

If only I felt that writing operas could change everything. If only I felt that life, concentrated into song, could be fruit juice for thirsty joggers. Alas, it is not so. Open mouths will continue to be unfilled. Open legs will continue to accept dross. Things that close, chemical, mineral, and otherwise, will remain closed; nothing will change. I can only do one thing: make nothing change beautifully. I am no longer haunted by echoes of Puccini. I know that all music is good, being music. I know that our most real riches are built of loss. I have become a giant of losing. I am simply monstrous, and monstrously fond of the Earth and its million daily deaths. I am consoled by no exit. I am dead to deadness, alive to death and life, and directed by street signs. Yet, I do not yield.

## #59

This has been something. This has been more than cadaverous. This has been a seeded fruit moved by wind into a reclining position. This has been a way and a means, an end and a beginning, a pedestrian's right to cross streets in Vienna. This has given me a wing-tipped prowling carnivore, and I am meat as others are. As I move on, I am stricken with a half-nervous, half-ebullient sense of Eternal Return. What is coming has already come and will come again, plaintive as human nightingales trained for five octaves. What is coming is coming back to the loss that will be gained perpetually. O flip sides of paradox, how inscrutable and Sphinx-like you seem, until a bullet-chord pierces you, until an arpeggio elicits an earth-shattering purr!

## #60

I can think of no afterthought. I can only say: *here I have been*. Music must bleed: let it. It will bleed into more and more of itself. It will spontaneously regenerate, nimble as an ice-walking fox in a blasted landscape. It will care for itself. I fall back like an exhausted lover, spent and famished. I am a cactus tree, full and hollow. I am one.

BEAMS: BLAZEVOX, 2007,  
HUMAN TOUCH, 2011



# I. BEAMS

**creep**

i'm inclined to play creep w/ a bagel

off-white dough gets kneaded  
black-shirted blue-jeaned green-horns

indented floors absorb sponge-light  
looks for line-riches, coffee-crucial cafés

leg strokes render you from his palm  
in paisley like an Oregon farmer

ploughs couldn't be more shared  
as you leave me, hardly, knock-kneed

**razor**

what perspective I have is slanted  
edged like needle-scars along arm-veins  
everything I can't puncture is there  
  
now "surprise" means you come back  
pointed to a blade, I call you razor  
  
as if fingers could untwine fish-eyes  
nails take off layers of anodyne  
  
bottoms grow hardened from rubs  
& sharpness be a baby's candy

## Sex hex

If she's skittish, don't skip her

you might just be a ball of yarn  
unraveled beneath her nails

or a bagged mind-fuck  
leaving her careening, ecstatic

nothing wrong w/ a little push

take her up, stroke her belly  
she'll think of Foucault

& possibly let you construct her

**solipsist**

are you serious, fucking

bent over bars, malt heavens  
bubbles bumping bed-posts, breakage

sweating mug, street-lake sea-shells  
last night around yr waist

you're knotted, not what you did  
pressed to the city's dry ice

deep down the throat of a solipsist

**café**

napkin-neat café decomposition

poster-plastered walls represent fresh being  
repetitious modes of sensual self-sacrifice

not recoverable by any stub-cottony means  
lightning track-lighting long-swallow lit-smoke

my grey-guts spattered on a table

unstructured strength it could be, cherry-red cowardice  
parallel shadows unplaced by any given

finally flight is taken from time's impossibility  
for solid substance, death's lettuce-deluge

self-naming can't be where this winds up

## Leaves

Leaves tonight are leaning  
spots of light inside inside-ness

then when you pause a moment  
wade in Poseidon's fountain

cherish the night's totality  
leaves become ground

for christening

## **Infinite Regress**

Modigliani-marvelous  
you collapsed perspectives

“vessel” in torso-line, reflected  
back, over your shoulder

you leapt from the frame  
colors in you remained canvas

fore-grounded dimensions



## Silk

if I could fashion a fashion from fashion

your fabric fluttered over my chest  
styled slacks pressed the length of Chelsea

shapely shadows arrayed over cheekbones  
shutters would close on our revelations

hair askew, damp in rouge-red blood-flow

a fashion past the lips of limitation  
defined not to distinguish or over-vogue

but to green silk that had been dusky  
and to tease out each stark blue

behind eye-lined, sky-lined walls of rigidity

## Loose Canon

shots ricocheted at borders

coated walls absorbed friction-lit brigades  
sensitive machines registered red hits

sleep fell on specifics regardless  
universals fried sausages

not much could be spoken of remorse

second skirmish sent forces scattering  
shards of green glass littered forest floors

irreplaceable antiques wiped their eyes  
on the cuffs of the loosest canon

I didn't expect immolation to arrive so soon

## Legs

senseless propositions

seem ruddy-cheeked in sky-backed night  
exhaust-fume dense from windowless space

you're black-hewn then, from spider-webbed heat  
(rubbed, boned over propulsions)

clouded lights prove unstable, shoot themselves off  
damp felt ends of feeling....

a state of affairs untouched by contraction  
simulacrum of finite regression

puddles and spoon-handles confuse themselves

**emmie**

dreams are irrevocably dreamt

much “noticing” goes on  
& metaphors are like similes

you remain gravy-wakeful  
I remain carving this air-turkey

“too cornered”, street between

slipper-shod graces, facts;  
uncles, ex-cranberries;

i can't carve a relation

**ex**

mimesis of no-détente

(m)oral play of difference  
I follow breath to be

as a blue painted vase  
El Greco-sepia room

crossed corrugated lips

regrets of rinsed locusts  
you “just knew” this

would happen, as you

“just knew” it’d happen  
when you painted me

## Whiskey

Balance, easily sought, is hardly attained;  
no sooner are we aloft than we're

buried beneath snow-drifts; grace follows damn-  
nation, damnation follows grace, & whiskey

soaked evenings are always a possibility.  
In fact, it's here that Li Po forged

whatever stealth was his, in the first buzz  
of drunkenness. I follow him, rattled, jarred,

& stymied by the world's cries, & my own,  
& soon I sit amid piles on both sides—

exultations, horrors, amassed like so many  
stamps, low-priced, out of date.

## Drip

I've received, refused one invitation into Middle America.  
Her body was a cornfield, that's true. Everything in it

was ripe. She engraved the invitation on my bed,  
mixed it into my drinks, taped it on the fridge.

It hovered between us like a mist, soon grew monstrous.  
*Shit or get off the pot*, she said. *Get while the getting's*

*good*. I was lost in the green rows of her skin. I was  
afraid of the Middle, it's ice-creamy easiness. It dripped.

By autumn, I blew it. The harvest moon shone on stubs.  
The pissed Middle swore to evade me forever. I don't miss it.

## Blog

every post you post is posted post-haste

succor-seeking cocks in your hand and mouth  
seminal urges baffle you like nitrous

chin-dribble takes back-space from your keyboard  
one hand pumps page-down, one inserts

shift mixes drivel and nut-sack sweat

I take tabs, control, alter, delete,  
sans cock-lock, escape-ready, home-truth entered

your print inscribes epithets on my X-key  
at an outpost, post-modernity betrayed

by your complete lack of question marks



## Pay

Summer's leaving, it's plague time.  
Penny-parted cogs scrape, blare, cut & swear.

Voices stay wall-stuck, slashed between  
poppy-dog chains. I've got purple before me.

It's like a hunger-chiseled face. I pay  
& pay; smoked heads flung into grimace,

I'm grimaced beneath smoke, oven-churned.  
She's cigarettes, restless, side-walked.

Excess weight pinches finely-nerved necks;  
mauve sky's a bared torso, an "if";

I could chunder, that's certain.

## **ladder**

stepped leaning ladders perched

like an easy-won confession  
“lover” is harder than it is easy

you of all people know this  
paleness deployed in guerrilla

lipstick attacks, Princess Leia

bangs coming down rungs  
don't walk under the trestles

I climb sideways into paint-cans

## II. APPARITION POEMS

**#3**

petals on a

bed you made,

against

ocean's breakers

**#27**

not across, not down

emptied, always grey  
such is this stuff

such is a hat's convalescence

**#14**

through a door  
genuine article  
three geezers  
many nods

pink Buddha

**#23**

how sky, clods in it,  
seems a near-melt,  
a blue-grey omelette;

traipsing brick surfaces

**#17**

three red flags, each winnowed  
around multi-colored stones,  
is how I've been hit,

how I've been gutted

**#19**

stick to

100

her blackness,  
you'll find  
moving stripes

**#42**

feet tap linoleum,  
shadow-play rhythm;  
not to be dogged,  
nerves infra-reddened

**#45**

“in order to”  
lose those blueberry shackles  
“fight hegemony”  
in moose-like context

I don't know how to

**#36**

after all  
everything  
you're still  
thinking

ochre-tinted

**#61**

never you worry  
honey  
on the table  
money

**#80**

I rev clean across  
I'm paved  
I'm rolling in moss  
I save

#87

windows up

higher

look through

into great wide opus

#89

o it's drab  
outside the trees

really only me  
I see there

#91

"I have  
eaten no  
plums"  
is what  
I told  
the trope-  
police

#85

not to be mistaken  
not to be messed with  
not to be forsaken  
only to be blessed with

how it must be on Jupiter

#75

sun is there  
not here

anyway  
the bed's made

**#70**

here, look,  
coffee in a cup  
wouldn't you  
just know  
I creamed it?

**#50**

she  
seems  
to be

up

at me

**#52**

conflate  
two leaves  
two ideas  
with veins

don't bark

**#54**

off, into rivers  
currently  
where you be

**#100**

art in "say"  
art in "do"

art

pass the ketchup

**#105**

cut short,  
pumpkin,  
but that's  
alright, as  
I feel cut  
also, by  
short kin,  
smashed.

**#150**

last September cricket  
leaf falls on him

**#162**

no room for thought  
glare on potted plants

flawlessly dumbstruck

**#163**

your face  
beige wall  
it's pictured

not that I  
can reach

**#168**

maybe I'll  
get broken  
in Hoboken

I'm joking



**#169**

you'll see  
it's urban  
as grease,

breaths I

take in a  
rush like  
this, this

**#170**

éclairs conspire  
all in a line

I'm hungry

for them to  
be written

**#195**

ordinary hull  
of a tight wad  
ship  
shop  
stop

**#200**

my hands measure  
hyena arousal  
as my mouth laughs

my my

**#201**

“a dream of form  
in days of thought”

the thought formed  
& it was a dream

**#203**

105

Who watches as antlers  
convolute themselves?

O dear

**#131**

she in blue  
out the door

cross

in the street  
red light

**#132**

at this time  
you're there  
but you won't  
remain, can't

after all, it's  
dear, staying

**#136**

Pollock's rhythm

took him up  
maybe too far

as to where we are

**#137**

to walk

is expressive

of having legs

*ad infinitum*

**#120**

unlikely thighs  
put upon a page  
white, long, lined  
can't complain

**#121**

what do I know  
what does "last" mean  
"last" is not "lost"  
purple frame, clear door.

**#124**

when a head tilts  
round eyes, snap

### III. MADAME PSYCHOSIS

## Sarah Israel

Memory wears white tee-shirts, is blue-eyed,  
that I "remember" her.  
This new kind of "I" passes fourth-grade notes,  
says "I like you" to her.  
It trailed off in her swimming pool.  
She was so spiteful.  
That "I" remember "her" is a kind of joke,  
but we did dance at Bar Mitzvahs.  
And some of them were slow.  
And some ended in other things.  
Call this an aesthetic of Tantalus.  
Tantalus was overeager in English class;  
a "he" in "she" seen by me.  
I heard of her exploits later.  
"She's so totally after him."  
"You don't have to strip to tease".  
I saw her in a seeing not seen by any eye,  
& the "I" that saw, saw my eye not at all.

**helen lee**

you said (it was a way of saying)  
hold me, touch, kiss. vagaries of  
bliss, explosive, like, lemons. like  
“like”. reach behind, “blind”. i’m,  
progressing, make. miner, key,  
brooding. expressive of the sole’s  
rubber. only a lamp through wind  
clarities. (not a, not, a, formula).

changing lit’s lace. how fetching,  
fowl. red, buttons, noticed, before,  
she, came. not tender, tenderly  
rendered, heart-rending lee “deus  
ex machine-esque”— “like glory”

## Dawn Ananda

clanders to clutch things in a snake-like grip;  
model-trim belly, w/ just the vaguest fat-hint  
towards hip-ends, is often bared in dancing;

hair, italian brunette, irish straight, gets caught  
in her mouth when a harsh caress tenses her;  
ass, perfect median meager-voluptuous, will

raise itself when she chooses a favorite CD;  
neck, african-elongated, porcelain-pure, frightens  
in the extreme refinement of its' delicacy;

legs, edible swizzle-sticks & gazelle-gorgeous,  
become erratic after three or four drinks;  
tongue, volatile entity-in-itself, is bellwether

of nothing whatsoever but what the strokes are up to

**lizzie mclean**

was all pot roast. hope:  
that I can't hold, doll.  
for you write, wrong. big.  
bold. ass, a nine-volt shite.  
"boners were tulips", yes,  
butt, I never, have never,  
battered heads, as such,  
w/ you. it's all weary  
simper. I, conned, take,  
your, "can't".



**paula**

chaos, order, clipped bird-like into  
wings & cries. i could only ever  
think: paula. all the thrusts &  
pumps that could never be. "all"  
that must be withheld, & that  
it might be better that way.

you gave me the gift: savoring  
wanting. how it really was you  
i wanted. not a body but a soul.  
i tell myself i've "been through  
you", forever & never. zero here,  
same as two. empty. saturated. dark.

## eye eye eye

nile-wide, eye eye eye.  
a sylph, bee low my buzz.  
it wants, to do, at mouth.  
no. not every one. can end,  
dare-a-licked, like is. or:  
put it, porn again. dew wit  
like its done, on, cyber.  
space, opened, bee twain. no,  
went in sight. tight tight.

**debbie jaffe**

& that i must caesar. arms, curd  
went down. found, mice, shelf, armor  
machine. wasp it up, & up, & up, real  
member a machine. then, head, shot,  
“she said”, she said. feel, linger, can’t.  
belly, caesar, belly. debit, giraffe, red-  
headed. purge to null, urge, two, pull.  
eye, belly, belie. ( )

## lucy stingle

yr back's back in back. black.  
fingers ride cheeks like sea-foam.  
soft cut of a hard look. tow-  
headed horse's ass pony-tail.  
rather a strong black-strapped sit.  
quick tongue-dart like plane's  
blinking beacon. now I'm "back",  
or you're fronting. easy trick. Rote  
gimmick. gerund: "gallivanting".  
meaning: to parade, wantonly.  
I'll, we'll, give it "back". easy. still black.

## Debra Harnigan

Noting/ cheekbone sluice/ china veneer  
Impulses/ bathroom stalls/ naughtiness  
I'm in on it/ gentle as anesthesia/ drops  
Disrupt/ retrograde attitude/ mercurial  
Your middle/ leaned up/ lifting belly  
Your bottom/ budging metal/ melting  
In-drip/ innards ingrown/ warm war

& then the how the went the into the flush

## Becky Grace

It's woven into her, that polo shirt. She might even fuck w/ it. Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz". Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing implying discrete boundaries. Becky isn't bounded, or has boundlessness woven into her...

Polo shirts are what they are, remain so. If I say "objective correlative", I bring string into it, so that Becky might be strung up. I don't deny a "literal" element, or that Becky might stay in. All I mean is, between "us", there's "more-than-us". That's what I'm "getting at"; it's woven into me

## IV. VIRTUAL PINBALL (with Lars Palm)

## Isla Perdida (Lars, w/ Adam)

somewhere between summer &  
eternity anesthesiologists  
wonder, where, the whitewash, went.  
There is certainly need enough  
for that, they further, muse. In  
wee hours of morning he claims to  
speak seven languages; says one of the  
municipal buses, runs, to a place called

*isla perdida* which may be where the  
horror writers sit & type all day or  
maybe in some, instances (insomniac  
anyone?), night-watched.  
& somewhere between lairs of  
the liars that be, a little, while, longer



**un-blown (now go & sin) (Lars, w/ Adam)**

a popular poplar parties  
w/ pre-menstrual princesses—  
that's blues for you.  
i shall over-churn that cop car.  
though, i'm, no occupational. or force,  
just a kid, with, shorts, & a  
slingshot. there's lost. of fun  
to be had w/ one of toes. god  
nose, hose down those  
who got bruised, by, the news.

or those used cars w/ broken brakes  
so poplar among third-rate  
pop-shears for reasons, un-blown.  
by the application of solid air-ity  
banks to issue interest-free  
loans to make it easier to start  
businesses in, precarious, areas.  
or a tuna sandwich,  
which is what he needs before  
he heeds the ball to charms. arms

race through the face of a  
shitting sun. one. or more, who's  
keeping score? sore boards  
bored pirate-ships w/ swaying  
hips to counterbalance the rocking  
& rolling of the waves singing  
that old song by queen. bohemian  
rap-sodden mean, no, mean, feat, by,  
their talk of lye. to fit right in. now go & sin

**this is a song (about how I'm a monkey) (Adam, w/ Lars)**

“what about, uh, what about a guy w/ an attitude?”

“oh yeah, we got guys like that”

I had problems;

I was arrested for jay-walking in Los Angeles;

I felt, OK, this was this type of character,  
in fact

I met people that were just trying to make a living  
paradox;

“for thirty years you walk side by side, overnight

lose everything, but not once do you blame

people, so people like yourself can reap the...”

filtered through my own perspective, hate-mail, a story...

“I'm a big fan of close-ups”, interested in the human  
face, there were some beautiful, like, crane-shots,

I mean, obviously, the greatest location of the human  
face, the eyes, the soul of the character,

“I feel it but I don't pay it any mind”

### Dick Cheney's Brain (Adam, w/ Lars)

Dick Cheney's brain— it's, a, kneel,  
right-male. Spend four days, figuring,  
poor, pabulum. Never get the image out  
of his mammary. Fox news knocks fuse,  
few, fugue, death-mew. Pleasure or  
virtue, which would you blues?  
Increasingly cloudy morning highs  
falling, though. Will satellite beer,  
round, mud, schlonger? Respect-  
shun was none too wood, board

crisis, moon. The hip-hop revolution  
has, taken, plays— ubu boos you. That  
doesn't mean the strategy is long  
run day one. Holding on to fewer &  
fewer trial, investors, wondering.  
Serious is set to announce it's big,  
also, general, motors. Could be  
forced to already analysts push  
chapter eleven. Chick, dainty, s'brain—  
it promised to back away from that.  
Promise making a settlement likely

**(don't wanna be nobody's) hero (Lars, w/ Adam)**

“should we not have been here before? were  
we not here before?” what do you mean  
by "here" & "before"? is this a dead  
end? & why should that matter, he  
asks himself, & the walls, the sun. it  
wasn't me who last saw him alive.

i think

it was that man in the checkered suit,  
you know who i mean; the one who  
always sings the songs nobody  
remembers— he sings them well, i'll  
give him that. one of them seems to be a  
hymn to the rising tide. oh, & while we're  
at it, what do you mean by "been"?

unless i

spelled that wrong & you're  
just hungry, not strangely curious  
about a dead man who (i think) will  
remain where he is...

## Debt (Adam, w/ Lars)

"you've got a radical  
extension of debt; it  
is being noticed; you  
can find an excerpt in  
hunger here at home

focus on the fact that  
he's a dwarf, falling  
through the Earth; with  
out a written language,  
feels shut out"

in the trial, lasting however-  
many months, fate in  
hands, "they already had  
one", it's called theology

hat's a life-span, a  
life-style; not the kind  
of family (though heavens  
may fall) the governments  
talk about

they can become show-men,  
that's (kind of) what they  
do; the job was, "done"

hell in (Adam, w/ Lars)

there's a "she" across  
the street  
who cooks  
butternut squash soup  
an "I" & a "he"

One really wonders

Sometimes she's seen  
in the window  
stroking her pussy

It could jump  
out the window  
nothing would change

Twenty feet of air  
divides "us".

She could be painted  
abstractly

I've done it.

Rhythmic brush-strokes  
swirling pink  
for her pussy

He hung it  
he's hung

I hung around  
eating her  
butternut squash

What kind of  
composition is  
this?

**the love of hopeless cusses (Lars, w/ Adam)**

what's there to wonder about? it's all,  
very, simple. There's a man across the  
street from her, on the floor above, who  
employs whores, she's apparently trying to  
provoke him into doing something  
obscene-- that shouldn't be too hard. What's  
there to chunder about? there is, as in  
all major cities, a housing shortage, & it's  
solved not by those who should & could  
solve it, but by those who need to, in any,  
way, they can. What's there to blunder  
about? enough of this, then. i think i'll go  
fondle some imponderable side-streets.....

## Virtual Pinball (Adam, w/ Lars)

I don't mind you mining  
for cheap, Google hits, it's  
par, for, the, purse. "just give  
me, my chair,  
get me out of  
my, hair". parse sparse blog-  
hogs. leave, a trail of,  
hosts— no metaphor.

this ain't no Moulin Rouge. or,  
you know how I read, it's cool  
w/ me. (I was Di's  
favorite waste of time)(I'm  
embedding a god-damned  
narrative, OK?) "one is over  
there, one's over here, it works."

Bertold Brecht,  
Nicanor Parra,  
Jimmy Page,  
Yossarian,  
Hans Castorp,  
Rumi (abused by translator),  
Hmphr Bgrt.

Di's (I've never  
seen) right there. We  
snuck in her back  
door, you can fake  
cough— we declare an  
era of

virtual            (fucking)            pinball



### body count (Lars, w/ Adam)

count one. one of montechristo. who didn't have the strange hobby of draping whole islands in plastic, or whatever, cloth. clothing, some say, should suit the weather. whether the body counts or not, the same some don't say. you don't say. surely madam, you jest. a runaway breast? here, on this street? no wonder all the drivers leaned so heavily on their horns. "sagawa chika". the last light of the day, normally a deep blue, turned green. & then yellow. that's when the birds took flight in a hurry. to beat the red they all thought was next

count two. won't say where, so let's keep with the math. but this is easy. we're just adding one. one what? oh, i don't know. word. thought. political assassination. or attempt at. silly monologue. house perched on mountain side. "alejandra pizarnik". there was only one. that's quite enough, thank you & don't forget the fish. you did after all bore it into biting your hook. that was rather impressive. watching mount st helens explode

count three. we appear also to be subtracting one. line, that is. was it lime we would be hard pressed to make an even half decent "margin-eater". why ever we would want to do that. "joan brossa". there is still so much fun to be made of things. & the finger of god blew off in the storm last fall. maybe, just maybe, there is something we could learn from that

count four. score & more. sure. a pure pleasure. after those 95 minutes of headless headmasters, witless witnesses & you name it. "philip whalen". barking back at dogs. laughing with happy chinaman after stealing his sack of candy which, he knows, were poems. posted on fence posts (?)

## look a tail

today's worst news  
run over twice by cops  
& the sweet animal rights  
activist didn't have  
time to save me

there's bound to be a  
cat in here somewhere  
unbound, hopefully, like  
that creature called  
"curiosity" pawing around

killing them by the  
thousands or that  
wisdom they're supposedly  
possessed by.....

Today's best news--  
a ham & cheese sandwich

# WHEN YOU BIT: OTOLITHS, 2008

# I. Sister Lovers

## Three Sets of Teeth

Three sets of teeth: who  
can check for cavities?  
A three-way circuit: who  
will start the striptease?  
Three lovers in three ways:  
how merrily the dance  
begins. We spin, we spin,  
we forget our instincts,  
anima, the part of teeth  
that cuts. We are sluts.  
There is an "I" here that  
stands for all of us, but  
its eyes are shut. Sleep  
lulls it to rest, not think. Or speak.

## A Web, A World, Wide

You and you: more than  
acquainted. You stand up  
next to each other, knock  
back tequila shots, scope  
out cowboy belted dudes.  
You're well acquainted w  
velvet-handed touches,  
window-pane lizards. Then  
I blow into town, rugged  
as a slick-booted rancher,  
hard as Japanese math. I  
show off rope-length for  
your amusement: something's  
spun: a web, a world, wide.

## Salt Orchard

Oh to be between  
two startled deer  
on a bus, one bare-  
backed, one shut-  
eyed, both blue.  
Oh exquisite torture.  
One's more  
mermaid than  
deer, salt orchard.  
One cannot  
get too laid.  
I take off my  
boots, both say  
*shoot, shoot.*

## In the Street

*Orgasmic Furniture Cellar:*  
OFC, bar-back, bare-back,  
Guyville. Toast: to circles.  
Then stand against a wall  
in an alley, paw-slide, drip,  
listen to car-screech as we  
taste the first spoils tingle.  
Couples leave: we laugh,  
being more, being three.  
Throw down a butt: it's  
a red flower dropped, a  
filled cup, I'm your butt.  
Mouths: scotch-tang, I'm  
eating scotch. Let's scoot.



## Apartment: Pizza Guy

Apartment: I'm lost.  
Here a bed, there a  
bed: no everywhere.  
Scattered butts hang.  
Couch: seat between  
two, silk-skirted, red.  
Blood on tracks left  
on coats, racks, bed-  
spreads, cool, kempt.  
Vibe: pulsing wants.  
Sandwich, mayo me,  
white-out, come age.  
Hey, you and you: do  
I look like a pizza guy?

## Big Black Car

Your middle: tongue  
(hers), man (me), riding  
together, I bitch (middle's  
middle). I tongue man  
you, her, spacious, it, of  
you, all of us, can't feel  
a nothing, I can't. Not  
of this, of you, of her,  
of all of this riding, in  
what looks big, black,  
has tongue-room. I  
can't feel a thing. I feel  
nothing of bigness, black  
fur interior her you. Ride.

## Bathtub

Syntactic inversion, when  
applied to three lovers, is  
a bathtub forced to hold  
more than it needs to. I  
want to emphasize this:  
at no point did I touch  
both at once. In fact, if  
you take a way a rogue-  
red surface, how dismal:  
soap, bubbles, razors, &  
a bunch of drunken limbs.  
Not much ecstasy. Fog in  
mirrors meant confusion,  
not consummation. Or come.

## Charnel Smoke

We're no holy trinity—  
our mouths full of glass-  
bits stained red, altars set  
up to hold limbs heaved  
over each other, cement-  
thick, drizzled on, wisps  
of charnel smoke rising  
in clumps of sodden ash.  
Resurrection is just more  
sex, incarnation guessed  
dimly, owing to jolts in  
groins groined like earth.  
I say "love", what comes?  
Nothing but wine, bodies.

## Downs

Round two, night, too:  
rubber off, rubber soul,  
knee-bounce, they take  
turns taking it, & me, in  
where shadow-plays go.  
Sheets: washed. Pillows:  
put up for my head, as  
she leans in, hands on  
my ass, as bounces her  
other, as I am hollow,  
as this is a perfect void.  
As this is, as things go,  
a thing for the Internet.  
I am ghosted: house of undoing.

## Sunday Morning

Dawn: two down, one up.  
I'm a blown-out tire, limp,  
scuttling to roadside diners,  
sipping coffee alone, both  
hungers hung like posters  
in chill blood-contours,  
sputtered past me, paste.  
I took them on in haste,  
so close behind me they  
lay, laid, lying in wait to  
do it all again, leave me  
without a pump, means  
of being full. I feel dull.  
*Memento mori* means eggs.

## Sunny Afternoon

Wicker Park coffee bar:  
I'm stirred, ill-starred, I  
sit surrounded. Bounds  
the deer, straight into a  
headlight: two, bright. I  
hang on one more cup,  
rapping to a sylph that  
hovers above: *save me  
from this squeeze*, tracks  
on my knee. She stirs  
me more. I spoon #2  
better, who's on a cell  
phone date even as we  
speak: *talk to me*. Please.

## Back of a Car

Asinine, as is, this ass is:  
ass I zip down into zero:  
anal, a null, a void, this is.  
I'm behind a behind that  
sits smoking, rubbing, pink-  
tipped, tender, butt, button.  
She watches me watching as  
I go brown-nose in another.  
Only *her car-ness*, averted by  
eyes to a wall, seems happy.  
Only she can stomach rubs  
of the kind that want plugs.  
Sparked tank, here comes  
no come, & aggravation.



## Grudge-Fucks

This, crazy, water-leakage:  
I slip-slide away into you,  
out of you, into her, out of  
her, we're oil-slicked birds  
squawking out minor-key  
laments for lost closure. I  
hang on the end of clothes-  
lines: I'm ten sheets, each  
dripped w grease, blood,  
butter, milk, a catalogue of  
epic grudge-fucks. Not that  
anyone has come. Each kiss  
is a suicide Jack in a game:  
sixty-nine innings. No draw.

## Cocaine Gums

I ache: dull, sharp,  
in a heap of paper.  
All paper: picture,  
bright, bold, dark.  
I have nailed you  
to a piece: black.  
I darken touched  
things: I'm used.  
I write you, you,  
you, as if kissed  
by a fresh body,  
rose-petal bliss.  
I drowse: numb  
as cocaine gums.

## Blue Monday

Inside out, upside-down,  
round & round. Now it's  
cyber, in screen-space, our  
dance is, on the Net, it is.  
A post posted post-haste.  
I'm a cipher, propping up  
a pungent myth, academic  
feminists might go for. I  
sit alone, screened, screams  
churning in guts, undone.  
Group grope blog bloke,  
that's me, player in three,  
fuck in words cuts too, I  
& you two, cut & pasted.

## Framed

Nailed, two, across— I  
have been glimpsing me  
from above, as a camera  
would, I am a still, this  
is a film, this has to be  
framed, no, don't hold,  
I can't, it's an offstage  
arm, both you & you  
speak like I'm (so) not  
here, I'm celluloid, I'm  
varicose, vein-soft, fake-  
bloody, cut, I can't move,  
you & you & I minted,  
taped, uncensored, dead.

## Gun Shy

How much can I?  
Far from gun-shy,  
I load, loaded, you.  
I did, and you, too.  
You and you come.  
You took me. You  
slicked come to run.  
I'm bled, come too.  
Awake, shaky, bed:  
gun set red to stun.  
Get myself ahead.  
Get myself my gun.  
How much gun for  
three in love? None.

## Tuesday

Yesterday don't matter:  
it's gone. Now: cut. I'm  
aghast. You're there, or,  
you're here with me. No  
car in sight. Sunset over  
Millennium. Big bean is  
accomplice. Look at the  
big blue water: it's us, &  
us alone, together, here,  
now, acid-peaking sans  
acid. Macro hand-holds.  
Micro lip-twists. Simple:  
I'm learning it these days.  
One on one: game, play.

## Dear Prudence

I nail this down in verse  
for one reason: pleasure  
is an oasis in a desert of  
fruitless labor, that is our  
writing-place. This is  
as valid as plucking fallen  
leaves in a crisp October  
dusk. In other words, I  
was given cranium, on  
many levels, drawn out  
into an outpouring, she  
made sure, I gasped out  
a dying fall, convergence  
occurred. Sue me, dear prudence.

## Just You

Don't choose two:  
I choose you, I do.  
I choose to do you,  
I choose to be you  
in different places,  
I am taking you too.  
Two is too much, is  
too little, is butter to  
milk shakes. Makes  
sense to choose, it's  
the best I can do, I  
have no other mood,  
moments are you, &  
just you, too: just you.



## II. Dancing with Myself

## Whiskey

I don't think I know anything:  
look how the sun sets in March,  
a cool night, not dappled, not  
glazed, a construction crew in  
the street, grinding away at  
pavement. These are my worlds,  
alone, waiting to be born again  
into her, or you, if you want to  
read this: streets, walking, cool  
like a flaneur around a city I  
haven't loved in five years. I  
know we'll come together again,  
and if we don't I won't be to  
blame. Tonight's for whiskey.

## Gist

Baudelaire conflated solitude  
with multitude. He was wrong.  
Or, look how good it can get,  
& bad, when you're backed in  
to a corner with only work to  
prop you up & give you gist.  
I'm in love with you, I spit  
when I say it cause I feel like  
I live in my churned guts, I  
look out the window, there's  
a street called Race, *ba ba*, I  
couldn't be any slower except  
if I started popping ludes again.  
Once-a-minute heartbeats rend.

## Dark Lady

You're more of a Dark Lady  
than I have ever hoped for,  
especially because when you  
betray me, it's with someone  
I love: me.

You're more of  
everything, actually, & you're  
also a pain in the ass. That's  
why I haven't let you off the  
hook. I'll wind up in my own  
hands again tonight, sans  
metaphors, like your full  
moon in my face, but you'll  
never know there's a man in you.

## Off

I write best when I have  
time to write well, & when  
I don't I cook dinner for  
myself, its' undercooked, I'm  
underfed, as the moon gives  
the stars head & I look at a  
new skyscraper & remember  
other, better times in my life,  
who I was then, & yes I feel  
myself start to spin like a top.  
I have lived, I'm living, & it  
only moves in one direction:  
on. My "on" is different than  
anyone's, it really is. It's off.

## Kinky Verbs

We have coffee, we talk.  
It's all very matter of-fact,  
which is funny because I  
sit there with a gargantuan  
hard-on, & we start saying  
the same things & I want  
to reach over the table,  
grab you, throttle, shake,  
pounce, bite, tear, chew,  
lick, all those kinky verbs.  
I measure out my life in  
Eliot quotes: this moment  
can't be forced to its crisis  
yet, but I'm no pair of ragged claws.

## **Kurt Cobain**

About Kurt Cobain: I swear  
(as I always have, even in high  
school) that I don't have a gun,  
& when I shoot it won't kill  
you (much.) Suicide applies  
also to pairs of people who  
make one person lying down,  
& every two-backed beast  
must decide at some point  
to live or die. These are the  
kind of thoughts you have  
on really long nights, when  
you find yourself too old  
to do drugs. Comfort in sadness?

## Palliative

I think of a window-jump:  
a bloody corpse, pavement.  
The point of no-point, gist  
of no-gist, nothing mirrored,  
just me dead. Smart to wait,  
eh? Smart to see if maybe  
something might happen. I  
am holed up here, cloistered,  
you might say, in this flesh  
of my flesh, body I call me.  
You may ask how many bets  
have been hedged. I choose  
(if you ask) not to answer. I  
find silence palliative, free.



## Crumb

My physical mechanism,  
burnt beyond belief, sits  
cross-legged on a wooden  
chair, writing this out. I'm  
listening to the first birds  
of spring: urban hymns,  
sonnets. Surely birds learn  
at some point not to peck  
at crumbs in the street, or  
maybe not. I am, myself,  
a crumb in the street, but  
nobody's pecking, not now  
anyway, this sixty degree  
night, pitched to sub-frenzy.

## Accost, accost

Staggering for a cigarette,  
a Goon cliché, chez me.  
I call your name out over  
rooftops in my head: on-  
lookers note how my  
neck-veins strain, body  
tenses, aura turns black-blue.  
I am become a late Rothko,  
waiting to be placed in a  
chapel, where you may glide  
by like Keats' Madeline  
& I can accost, accost.  
I fall, I swell: "thorns  
of life" is a neighbor's cell.

## Splat!

What greatness thrust upon  
me? Solitary Saturday night  
fever, jive talking to myself,  
doing lines of Advil, falling  
off imaginary bridges: splat!  
The familiar trope of falling  
endlessly, this is how I stay  
alive. All because you are, I  
affirm, more than a woman,  
but, unfortunately, not just  
to me, but to many generally.  
I suppose I could blazon you:  
rhubarb thighs, persimmon  
twat, etc, but not productively,  
& what would Travolta say?

## One Long Mistake

Once I heard a Zen master  
say, *my life is one long mistake.*  
Well, as I lean into afternoon,  
I notice that running errands  
doesn't solve anything, & I'm  
defeated by my rudeness &  
everyone else's too, & I look  
forward to a day where I don't  
feel taxed to the point of idiocy.  
What happened was, I received  
an insult in the mail, & threw  
the I-Ching & a tough hexagram  
came up. My father's son turned  
out not to be me, but online, him.

## Objective Correlative

Talk about an objective  
correlative: I walked into  
my bathroom to find a  
huge cockroach on its  
back beside the toilet,  
legs flailing (having just  
discovered God's death  
in Nietzsche, I'd guess),  
but at any rate I killed  
the bloody bastard, it  
felt good, I felt strong  
& thought: wow, to be  
God all I have to do is  
keep killing: what a buzz!

## Deodorant Redolence

Rage is senseless, I rage  
in a cloud of senselessness  
against the confines of a  
first layer of rage against  
the confines of a region  
of loneliness buttressed  
by a feeling that deodorant  
is an insult against redolence  
that I haven't guts to embrace.  
I shower every morning, I  
even bathe after I shower,  
what this has to do with  
anything is beyond me,  
except that I like your dirt.

## Narrow Alley

I had a spiritual moment,  
standing outside Wagon  
Train, waiting for a pot of  
coffee to brew, consisting  
of this: sunlight striking a  
brick wall on the far side  
of a narrow alley put me  
in London talking to Chris  
McCabe on a sunny pied  
day, not grey: languidness  
mixed with desire through.  
I leaned against a lamppost,  
& this impressed me most:  
as spirit goes, nothing moves.

## Hyperventilation

Hyperventilation of almost  
there: we'll make it yet, on a  
dove's wing or any adorable  
cliché you can imagine, we'll  
make it, & then all this sad  
time between will seem like  
sheets of sound never heard.  
We stand in our own history,  
newly made & in the making,  
we stand for each other &  
for laying down together to  
lay down burden's burden,  
to make love's love in stereo.  
I'm not a saint, you're not a ho.



## Time's Arrow

Cigarettes smoke me, I  
languish in their mouths.  
I am eaten by my dinner,  
flushed by my toilet, put  
on the shelf by my books.  
Time's arrow means that  
the next line happened  
before this, I am moving,  
not crab-like, sideways,  
but backwards towards  
my birth. If everything  
that's to happen between  
us already is or was, I can't  
whine about being born again.

## Lick Butts

I find Philly full of shit.  
I find the streets shabby,  
the bars tacky, the poets  
worse. What's all this if  
you're here? Nothing. I  
can embrace mediocrities,  
lick butts off sidewalks,  
piss in alleyways, only for  
the joy of being near you.  
But I'm still waiting, even  
for that, & it's a chilly day, &  
I just swallowed a razor, it  
tasted like musk of scallops.  
I joked when I said I'd lick butts.

## Office

This is my office: shit.  
Imagination abeyance,  
piercing eyes abruptly  
withheld like legal pad  
documentation of a car  
trip around America. I  
say, where are you, but  
I know exactly where you  
are, & how long it will  
be before everything can  
be spilled into its proper  
container. No windows  
in here either, an article  
tacked to the wall: Jacket.

## Stomach Flu

It's like, I have a virus  
in my guts that forces  
me to puke you up every  
time I eat anything tasty.  
I puke, shaking through.  
I know what I need to do—  
stop cigarettes & coffee &  
booze & toffee & all things  
that seem excremental  
when lust for life has gone  
rusty. Your increased bust  
has made me allergic to  
cherry flavored colas, syrups,  
brandy, candy fits, & shit.

## Tomorrow

In our beginnings are our  
ends: tomorrow we meet.  
I have called *de profundis*,  
you have listened, & now  
we're younger than a fete  
in Liverpool, July, 1957, a  
drunken teenager lighting  
up a stage, come on, let's.  
More happy love! More  
happy, happy love! What's  
happiest is the perception  
that my eyes are clarified  
to/for you, to/for me, &  
when we're incarnate, one.

### III. Two of Us

## Screw

I want you to be like a bull.  
I want you to call me a fool.  
I want to be ass-proud for you.  
I want you to call me to screw.  
I know this iambic is dry.  
I know this excess has to stop.  
I know I can laughably cry.  
I know blood can come drop by drop.  
I come for you kicking my ass.  
I've come to be making a pass.  
I've come undistracted by "I".  
I killed off my "I" as it's dry.  
I start off these lines in the sand.  
I want to end up in your hand.

## When You Bit...

I knew every Dracula-like whim  
I felt every pulse of salt-water  
I screwed every screw into wood  
I was with you in Atlantis

you were daft, exalted, pinkish  
you were drunk on Margaritas  
you were dark, pliant, rakish  
you were ready to be examined

by my hands, twin detonators  
by my tongue, laid on a half-shell  
by my teeth, rabid officers  
by my torso, raw, wave-flecked

this is not merely afterthought  
this is portentous as first-time sparks



## Sweat

I'm willing to sweat  
to get to you, if you  
promise to sweat me  
hard as any August.  
I exert myself in red  
exercises, smeared  
lipstick on assets, not  
yours, but this is not  
what I'm coming to.  
I'm coming, not to  
get but to come out  
and in, in and out of  
what we might call love.  
I pump you full of lost crickets.

## Hips

I didn't have to let  
my hands slide down to  
your hips, but I did it  
to express to you that  
gravity works between  
us, apples fall from  
trees, knowledge lives  
in apples, intact or bit.

There is no blush here.  
There is only a stemmed  
sense of the inevitable.  
I am bitten through. I  
am waiting for you to peel  
"sin" from "skin". Again. Again.

## Cake Walk

Am I rough enough  
to disperse kinks in  
your make-up, hitch  
you to a post, make

you wait for my cake?  
Waiting can be a bitch  
when your sanded skin  
still feels scraped, tough.

This could be cake-walk.  
Are you too jealous, do  
you feel urges to stalk  
each stile I walk through?

What you see, you batter.  
What you walk on, matters.

## Duration

This eclipse: I'm durable  
only before, after. Throat  
parched, nightingale loud  
in my trees, I'm beechen.  
I'm green. I send myself  
into forests after you, I  
skip over streams, being  
stone: heavy, jagged, on  
top of slugs, worms, dirt.  
My heart: too thick, aches.  
I don't want beer, I want  
to be wound around you.  
Deliverance: beds of muck.  
It's what I can say you suck.

## Empress, Reversed

I can feel how you want to turn  
newly colored leaves over, but  
not turn over yourself: thusly  
avoiding change's busy necessity.  
I am a leaf to you, I am openly  
veined. I am not to tap but to  
paste in a book, frozen in place,  
tidy crisp surface, sun-spotted  
but easily taken inside. I feel this,  
with a sense of being rooted  
elsewhere: in ocean, breakers,  
crashing only to lash again.  
Your creation is an alien.  
I call him illegal.

## Decreased

Skin is pierced; veins jarred;  
quickly interiors come out.  
You are decreased by me.  
I am decrease made flesh,  
piercing you, letting eddies  
(preciously stored) free.  
To be dead together: death.  
Dead things are not scarred;  
they drop, decay, stiffen. If  
life is soft, this death is hard.  
I say “death”, I mean what  
compels me to bite you. My  
nails: bitten through. What’s  
simple to you: out of my eyes.

## Mouth Around

I could fly with you  
around the universe,  
it would be no worse  
than a kiss so untrue  
it stings like alcohol,  
or jellyfish veins, red  
& blue, near squalls  
of ocean, kept in bed.

If my currents sting, I  
must say it's because  
I'm a fool, pie-eyed,  
with no grasp of laws  
that teach our mouths  
quiet. I mouth around.

## Salmon

To swim up you, relax  
into currents, join them  
like upstream salmon, I  
must forget skinned fins  
you ate with relish, stew.  
What I get; more head to  
head swimming, or back  
to back lust purges, screw-  
topped horizontal strips.

I am no more and no less  
than your zebra, zebra in  
transition to fish, striped  
to attract water out of you,  
to move me softly to blue.



## Hay Ride

I do long swings for  
you, I am a monkey, I  
climb without haste to  
a perch of your making.  
I am full of tricks, I can  
see how you tinge, dye,  
fringe, flip things around.  
I do not wish to climb  
down. I swing between  
your legs, everywhere  
else, too. You've taught  
me what to do. Caught  
in a sort of jungle hay-ride,  
I eat what meat has died.

## Denuded

Just because I remembered  
your birthday, you think I  
want to blow your candles.  
I don't. I want to flick a  
wick towards your wax  
parts, partly waxing. I  
want to pretend this is  
a no-icing situation. I  
have no scruples. I have  
a bunch of holders. I  
have a sense of timing  
where fire is concerned.  
Every match is happy.  
Every suit is denuded.

## Straw Rut

Well! If I were the twerp  
you said I was, how did  
the Red Sea part when I  
crossed borders into hid  
zones, stepped over your  
straw rut to find a bed,  
wove a winding sheet into  
fortune-fucked tapestries?  
Not that your head-flips  
(matted flaxen vanity) or  
self-satisfied, beer-dripped

smirks ever plagued my  
flesh, but that you tried.

## Severance

I will leave you, presently,  
as your lips to me remain  
marsh-grass catching dust  
from a whirlwind of pain,  
bulrushes sans Moses, rust  
on the hinge of a trapdoor  
used to fool circus-goers  
into aping a jealous Moor.  
Oh you are elegant, for  
you know each sonnet  
backwards that was ever  
spat, but still you're on it,  
the bed, with limbs severed.

## Love Poem

You say I'm "out there",  
you're "in here", where  
you are, if here's a crab's  
shell, a patch of crab-

grass, anything sharp or  
snappish. You're closed,  
simply. Or, say the war  
points us from closure.

Don't wreck composure.  
Don't mold me in spite.  
Don't do anything, but  
open yourself as a door,

that a knob might be used,  
"in" & "out" re-confused.

## I'm Down

Forest: within it, I'm  
field mice, I scamper.  
Over still streams I  
watch your beechen  
green strips fold off.  
I hide beneath logs,  
consoled by slugs. I  
intermix w acorns, I  
sharpen my teeth on  
pictures of you. I am  
down wells. I'm down.  
My body is grounded.  
I've been pounded by  
solitude: thus, I frown.

## Stiff Scorpions

This desert is of me: rubies  
scattered past stiff scorpions.  
Each tail that could've come  
up, over small heads, now past  
latency into permanent prick.  
What's dead is still sharp: do  
you dare wrest red rocks from  
this heap? Are you scorpionic  
too? Have they kicked you out  
of encampments for flexing your  
tail? These carcasses are wounds  
I have given; rocks a secretion of  
each short, sharp shock. I have  
stung. I go on. Can you come?

## Salted Skin

You're way out to sea  
when you roll down your  
car window, blast songs  
written for high school  
parking lots. I'm hardly  
there. I'm occasional. I  
float like an abandoned  
raft in the passenger seat,  
smoking butts, smoked  
by your insistent nerves.  
Maybe I glance over to  
you, maybe not. Either  
way, your salted skin  
glistens, reflects, repels.



## Sheet Covered

I am ready not for bed,  
but for being sheeted,  
shuddered over, under,  
completed by your head.  
This is no thin slice of  
what passes for profane  
love, gives aches, pains,  
and also is sheet-covered.  
I mean to say, sheets can  
be a kind of metaphor, or  
substitute for what plans  
we make to cover wars.  
I am ten sheets to wind.  
I want you to bed me again.

## Hooded Eyes

I am alone with alone  
tasting dregs, begging  
to be let free into red,  
where mouths leak rose,

where come-hither glows,  
& all the things she said  
hover around me singing,  
& the ways we were stoned

inhabit us like spirits,  
light radiates out of us,  
Gods are laughing near us,  
not a sale but clearance

to be young, vindicated by  
a certain gleam in hooded eyes...

# CHIMES: BLAZEVOX, 2009

## #1

I remember chimes. They were a swirl and eddy above a yellow door. Swaying happened and a noise and a rocking of wind; I was alive to light. I did not say, but was; I was not is, but being. There was a window opposite that was a rectangle and a flood of blue. Light was piercing it in beams and it was a movement and a lingering. I noticed the music of things, even then. I noticed that there was music not only in the chimes but in colors set against one another, yellow and blue and the white arms of the crib and in a moment I could taste them all together. I experienced moments as a kind of eating: I was hungry and I did.

## #2

An iron on my feet was a big burning; a TV was a big noise but my noise, my burning noise, was bigger. My Mom rocked me in a small kitchen that was a mess of edibles, non-edibles, things that were there because we could use them. Soon there was a scar and it stayed there for a long time, I would look at my foot and remember the burn and be pleased; in the scar I had kept it, I had encased it in my flesh, it subsisted. Continuance was an excitement and a way of still existing. Sudden balloons of joy erupted often from faded pain.

### #3

Tookany Creek shone of moonlight lavished on it from a sky that stretched over our big backyard. I stood at the window and it was late and I looked at the creek and it was a kind of song. I thought it was a dream and I thought that this was dreaming but I stayed there at the window and there was a shed in the backyard, it was blue like our house, but with white shutters and it was there for no purpose but as something between me and the stream that shone white and black from the moon. I stood at a level with my window and the stream made a rushing rustling noise and it was speaking to me and I listened.

#### #4

Father, my father, was there and he was fixing my window with special nails and I said I didn't like them and he said *they don't like you either*. First my father was there in the house and he was picking up a spilled scrambled egg with his foot and saying *handy foot* or then he was at a picnic table in the yard with lots of big people on a sunny day and much smiling but that was soon over. Much was soon over and I knew what over meant in a young way and I sang into a tape recorder with over happening in the background. There was still hearing after over was over and after everything was over I went back to a room inside myself meant for continuation and continuing continued, and had not to ever end or be over.

## #5

I was in my room that was a world and that looked out on Tookany Creek. What I heard listened to, playing my father's records on my turntable, was the sound of the sun coming through the window. The scene was set to a place that was not world, was entirely of itself, was a piece of another world and yet was in my world whenever I wanted. I wanted and wanted the music, and the sound was all around me and I wanted things that would let me sound like this world in my world, which was of me. I began hearing what I saw in Tookany Creek and eating moonlight in my ears.



## #6

We had to go to an ugly place to see Grandma Bubba: a big dirty street with no trees. There were people beaten and bloody and there were policemen but still I would leave Bubba's house and hang out in the lot with dirty children. They had firecrackers and they accepted me because I did not judge them but still I was me and they were who they were. Once one of them came to Bubba's door to ask for money and Bubba said no and Bubba was blind and poor and her sisters were poor too. Bubba was blind and smoked cigarettes and made dirty jokes that I didn't understand. The ugly place was there and never changed.

## #7

Our house on Mill Road was a two-story wooden twin painted sky blue, placed on a curving block on the bottom of a steep hill, and was itself on an incline. The wide backyard, where was a large wooden shed also painted sky blue, and which fed onto a gravel path and then down another incline into Tookany Creek, was set sharply lower than the front door and then Mill Road beyond it, while across the street shone the side face of another hill, on which began the houses on Harrison Avenue. The effect of this portion of Mill Road was seclusion, intimacy, and rusticity— it looked very much like a nineteenth, rather than a twentieth century innovation. The moon above Mill Road was secluded along with us, coaxed into a space privatized by immersion in a world apart from the rest of Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township, Philadelphia, and the wider world. That emotion, of being apart from things, was blended into harmony or moodiness, exultation or melancholy, by the song of the creek and its currents. Though my block eventually intersected with Church Road, where there was more worldliness, traffic, and a general sense of movement, what echoed in me on Mill Road was a way of being alone, of being private. I had no siblings. No surprise that the house was haunted by strange ghosts, strange ghosts and echoes. I awoke once covered in spiders and they were dancing and I couldn't get them off. Also a big round white light came into my second floor window, it shone there and dazzled me and screamed and my Father told me it was a police searchlight and I believed him but he was wrong. I can see the light today and what it was doing was charging me and I was being prepared to serve in a kind of army and I am serving in a kind of army now: the light knew. I screamed out of pained recognition when I saw it and that was a spirit that haunted the house. Other echoes shone off the surface of Tookany Creek, which soothed but was itself of another world that was faraway and deep and that I couldn't reach even when I waded in it.

## #8

What drew me both to play baseball, and follow professional baseball, was an instinct. The drama and excitement of the game was enticing to me. When you play a game, you become more-than-you; you turn in an engine which develops into more than the sum of its parts. The kings of baseball were masters of a certain kind of reality, bearers of a certain kind of wisdom, and holders of a certain kind of knowledge. The trick was a simple one: to face confrontation boldly, no matter what. To dare yourself, also, to understand, that a life with nothing risked is no life at all. So, as a little prince of CAA baseball, I dared to face whatever pitcher was at hand, bat in hand. It laid down a gauntlet for the rest of my life: when you reach a precipice, if you have the nerve, jump. And I did.

## #9

What I found in school was a world too slow, too drab for my tastes. What it meant to have a teacher was to have an adult standing over you, directing your actions, playing to be obeyed, and obeisance did not come naturally to me. The corridors of Myers Elementary School were long, high-ceilinged, and oddly shaped; Myers itself was odd, as a labyrinth of weird spaces, and in my moments of freedom there I communed with a structure which was to my taste. In class, I vented a sense of pent-up rage by making jokes, and when other kids laughed I found myself riding a high I later found in baseball, music, theater, parties, girls—anywhere ordinary consciousness could be raised above average, where you could transcendentalize past norms. It was a way of being on fire. I got used to disciplinary action against me, to being a semi-reprobate; but the high I got from class-clowning, and from wildness in general, was potent, fiery, and high-ceilinged in and of itself.

## #10

I brooded through summers of playing ball and lemonade and behind Mill Road, behind Tookany Creek was a Little League field, and I would play there. I would play and bigger kids would come around on bikes and I would be threatened and there would be a few others with me. We would play until we were too spooked to play, because the teenagers were acting funny and we didn't know then what pot was or about strange peppery smoke or about what happens to people on drugs, and we were scared of the noises and the smells and the cars and the headlights at sunset when playing stopped being fun anyway because the ball could hit you on the head.

## #11

O what does the music mean but not mean when you are so small that you have no defense against it? Riding in a car and a voice said *touch if you will my stomach, see how it trembles inside*, and it was strange but more violent than a body of water, even one that moved, and the voice was of me but not yet, because there was something in the voice that knew me (and anticipated me) without me knowing it, and it was a voice that danced and it meant heat hot heat hot heat.

## #12

I was in the bathtub and I said my name over and over again until I forgot myself. The lights in the bathroom were on but I went deeper and deeper into darkness, and an empty void, and I heard my name as a something foreign. I heard my name, and I truly was not, I was a null and a void, null and void, and I had no self to be. Then, slowly, I regained myself, but I did not forget the essential emptiness, the uncompromising NO that I found behind the quotidian YES of selfhood. This happened also riding in a car to Aunt Libby's, and listening to the radio I thought NOTHING ANYWHERE until NOTHING got so big I shut my mind down in fright, and my consciousness streamed mellower.

### #13

My father was then in an apartment. I loved the apartment because it was small and different from the house and I could listen to cars late at night. I could listen to cars after watching baseball on a little black and white Panasonic and I was on a couch and it was comfortable and different and I loved my father for being apart from the house and what usually was. There were Steak-Ums in the apartment and a china bull and many times we went to see the Phillies play because it was important to have fun and for my father to be my father and do what that meant. I even once rode on a motorcycle driven by my father's friend and held on tight but the wind was almost too much. My father was almost too much too because he was so apart from the much that always was in me.



## #14

There was decay so that my Mom and Dad could not even talk. I met people in suits that were called lawyers and who had cold offices downtown and who asked me questions about what I wanted. I had no choice but to choose so I learned that life was about choices that you can't look back from, can't take back, can't do anything about except to move fumbling forward from, and I moved fumbling forward from choices. Now there was another Mom and Dad to go with the first two, but there were too many Moms and Dads and I was too alone and when I stared into the bathroom mirror, or any mirror, I saw that I was very far from what I had seen in the creek, the moonlight, the night, the stillness.

## #15

O, for American summers of ice cream, basketballs, hot dogs, softball fields. On three special weekends a summer, day camp became sleepaway camp, before I had been to sleepaway camp. We sat on picnic tables on Friday afternoons, after the rest of the camp had departed, waiting for the fun to begin, and our sleeping bags had been deposited in the Rec Hall. It was in the air then for me, and on the sunny Saturday mornings that followed: a sense of absolute, boundless freedom. Looking out over the fields, the archery range, the equipment shed, and back up to the rock path at the foot of the Rec Hall's steps, the day glistened inside and around us, a feast of gracious gifts. If we could inveigle a counselor to supervise, we could use the swimming pool, maybe (if he or she were mellow enough) for hours. The pool itself was up and around the corner from the Big Top pavilion, where the other counselors fired up tunes on their boom-boxes and gossiped about the night before, less ecstatic than us to be here in Norristown. Many times, I claimed the equipment shed as a personal fiefdom, so as to organize massive, junior-professional softball games. Everything was trundled out to one of the two fields which was separated only by a wire fence from narrow, curvy Yost Road, and more empty fields on the other side of it, which I often stared at, entranced at a young age by nature spirits without being consciously aware of it. Counselors played with us, including CITs (Counselors-in-Training), and the context required us to cut heads— if you weren't good enough, you couldn't play. Later, down all the fields I ran, shirt tucked into shorts, playing capture the flag. Or, there I sat at the campfire, being told scary stories, feeling the magic of a small clan huddled, marshmallow soft (as the smores we cooked) in that realm: *camp*. Eventually I discovered sex, my sex, through the knowledge of a little girl who saw a big man in me. She held my hand and kissed me, and it was a deep wave of knowledge that left forever aftershocks rattling my walls with fire and thrill, frisson. Those lips were tender, were fevered, were forever cleaved to me in my imagination after that one night outside the Dining Hall, which was suddenly far away as Neptune. There was a brooding and a bittersweet and a knowledge of what can be achieved when two poles of being meet in the middle to kindle sparks. I held on to it.

## #16

Suddenly there was a school that was a bigger school. There were lockers and a sense of importance; a combination to remember that was only mine. There were faces that were unfamiliar and a feeling that things were forming. I was always on the telephone because real dialogue happened on the telephone away from the presence of intercessors. I was always on the telephone because what was forming was a group that was not for everyone and I was in it. The group of us that was not everyone had rules that must not be spoken. What must be spoken was all the ways in which we were all moving forward. Moving forward meant being big and bigger and bigger, knowing more secret knowledge, occult practices of the teenagers we were trying to be. It did not mean the fullness that I still saw in Tookany Creek. Now, every day was regimented around who could talk to who, and how. The new school, more straightforward architecturally than Myers, had long narrow hallways with uncarpeted linoleum floors, and tended to be dimly lit. The journey from class to class was an adventure of seeing what new faces there were and discovering what they meant. My new friends would talk to me and not others. Alex, especially, formed myself and others around him as though we were a shell. Once the formation was established, as I was encouraged to dress how they dressed and say the things they would say, I understood that a kind of circuitry around us was closed. Tookany Creek ebbed and flowed, mutated, gurgled, or froze, given what the weather conditions were, but we were more hardened. In the parlance we used then: we were cool. Alex was tall, medium build, and imposing. He had been around Europe and Puerto Rico and was worldly. He knew how to be and stay cool. We talked on the phone every night. I was being cultivated. The clique was Alex's fiefdom. I had none. When I was over Alex's house, I picked up his white Fender Stratocaster and remembered all the records I used to listen to, how I'd wanted to play music. I wondered if I ever would. My problems with obeisance showed up again: I could not obey Alex, or the rest of the clique, the right way. I wanted to be more free. But it took time, the length of an entire year at Elkins Park Middle School, for this to be acknowledged and assimilated. For then, I held the axe, postured, and let an enormous question mark sail out of my consciousness and off into the air, before making my way down to the party in the unfinished basement, where Alex held court.

## #17

Hypnotized by the wholesomeness of what had come before, I couldn't relate to being cool. I saw through what I saw through, I couldn't articulate it but I tried, and because I tried they called me a fool. I was a fool for caring and wanting to share and thinking that everything should be spoken out loud. I was a fool for being awkward when I should've been confident and confident when I should've been awkward. I kept trying to keep up, I wore Benetton and Ton-Sur-Ton, I wore a blue and pink Swatch, I had parties, but still it was all wrong, wrong for me, wrong to have my mouth forced shut by cool protocol. I was an artist, before I was an artist.

## #18

I fell in love with one who symbolized my struggle with “cool.” I was a slave to her gaze, which went many ways, and was a burr in my side because she had no mercy. It was not to be. I was in love and it gave her an excuse to taunt which would relieve her pain, which was not an artist’s pain and unacknowledged, and so taunts became the taut tensions of my everyday existence, and I bore up as best I could but I was only considered cool “in a way.” Because I had not formed, I wanted what was outside of me; I needed my own help. I coveted her surface patina of blood and chocolate: that ooze.

## #19

On a soft green spring day, I found my father at my mother's house. Bubba was dead, had jumped head-first from a high window. She jumped because her partial blindness had become total. She had given many warnings which were not heeded. I looked at April blooming on Mill Road and thought of this and could not locate a center. Grass was green and the sun shone and I felt nothing even as I reached for a feeling. Suicide means you can't blame people for feeling nothing, though I did not think her culpable then or now. How I sat and listened to my father was by looking at his red Chevette and mystifying myself.

## #20

We were moving. This was to be the end of Tookany Creek as an active presence in my life. I felt Mill Road move into a new space in my mind for things that no longer subsisted, like Bubba. The new house, like Mill Road, was on a street that curved, and unlike Mill Road was of red brick. The houses on the opposite side of the street, which varied architecturally, formed (as was later grateful) a wall so that you couldn't see it, but Cheltenham High School loomed behind them, a humongous parking lot flanked on a far side by the building itself. When the CHS marching band practiced in the lot that autumn, I heard them, boisterous and bumbling. It went with the smell of red and yellow leaves burning. I had no presentiment at that time what CHS would wind up meaning to me. I had a new room on the second floor overlooking the street, and one streetlamp which looked haunting at night. As with Mill Road, few cars passed. The house had a second floor porch we didn't use much, and a stone slab first floor porch where we would sometimes eat dinner when the weather was clement. Mom threw parties there too, sometimes for new neighbors. This was a neighborhood she would be a part of, even if there was (it turned out) no special place for me. The bathroom was a special shade of yellow, as was the basement where the washer and dryer were. I didn't like the new house at first because it was new, it didn't look like Mill Road and my room was painted aqua like toothpaste and had a funny smell. The night we moved in I gorged myself on sweets and lay awake in pain for hours, the same that had happened at Bubba's wake. Then I became adjusted and Old Farm Road had its own place in the hierarchy of places that were, or were to be, more or less numinous, lit up with the religion of music and harmony, in my head.

## #21

For a long time there was no sound that was my sound. Then one night, I was at my father's house, which was not Old Farm Road. Glenside, this Glenside, was posh, luxuriant. On the radio I heard a sound that I knew instinctively was my sound. It was resonant, sharp, and had echo; it sent reverberations out to the four corners of the earth; it would not be denied. The music began with a short phrase, a riff, played on a hugely fuzzed electric guitar. The riff, allowed to reverberate and fill a large, studio-generated aural landscape, was a thunderbolt shot down from Olympus. It tugged, as baseball did, at everything in me which was masculine, courageous, outrageous even, daring. When a human voice was heard, filtered in, intoning a harsh reprieve to an errant muse (*You need coolin', baby I'm not foolin'*), it could be heard as vibrantly raw or merely shrill, singing in a very high register. My own consciousness perceived nothing but the vibrancy of power: extreme, uncompromising volatility and nerviness. The drums filled out an expansively drawn landscape with even more authority, as though a tribunal of Greek gods had converged and were sending secret messages to me in Glenside, ensconced with headphones while my father watched TV impassively across the room. When the guitar spoke for itself, above the fray and accented by space made for it, it was a form of blues made sophisticated beyond blues I was familiar with: all the agony and bravado of blues guitar pushed into a space where more eloquence was required, to achieve a necessary release past overwhelming tension. The cascades of notes were not just a release: they were a hint and a missive sent to me about the possibility of ecstasy on earth, achieved nirvana, release from karmic wheels. The aural landscape was rocky, mountainous, and allowed the listener to climb from peak to peak with it. In short, it was a place I'd never seen, a miraculous place, with landslides clanging over other landslides so that no stasis or silence need be tolerated. I had to merge with the landscape, join it, become it. I would not be able to sit still unless I became one with this sound, until I could similarly reverberate. I needed to reach the four corners, the mountain peaks, along with it. This sound that began with a loud guitar, played hotly, showed me the world seen through an auditory prism of light and shade.



## #22

Things shifted. I went from cool to killed-by-lack-thereof. In a period of isolation, I learned about reversals, about temporality and its ruthless one-handedness. I faded into a kind of wallpaper; the kids around me did not, perhaps, see me at all. Then, as winter changed into spring, things shifted again: friends appeared out of nowhere, I had a role to play that was substantial, exterior blossoms and blossoming things had an interior echo in my consciousness. I learned thusly how one must wait to be blessed, that patience is a virtue close to heaven, that all things are eventually answered by their opposites, if the soul is maintained closely. I learned that seasons have each a particular flavor and shape, like candy and snowflakes, and that each season must have a slightly different meaning.

## #23

My first guitar was sleek and black and an Ibanez Road-star; my amplifier was small and black and a Peavey backstage. These were my appendages and I treated them as such. A day without substantial exercise was unthinkable; every new musical phrase was a mountain to climb and a chance to demonstrate the doggedness of an artist. I was dogged and I could soon make many noises that had the robust quality of reaching the four corners; what was important was that this was a kind of marriage. I wedded my guitar without ceremony because every moment was a ceremony that was holy and part of me. I was soon a musician and I could know no other way to be because this was ordained and my destiny. I had found one key to Tookany Creek, and it was in the process of moving my fingers artfully. As they moved, my heart beat in rhythm, my brain facilitated this and all things were joyous.

## #24

Now I had a sister who was half my sister, who was a baby and who I played with. My time was divided so that I was a brother half the time, when I was with my father and my other mother, who was not my mother. My life grew to have many compartments and I lost the cherished sense of continuity I had had, because things never continued. My life was splintered and I had more life than I should have had, and my world was an overcrowded subway car. All I could do (having chosen to be splintered) was ride the variegated waves as they broke around me, and my half-sister was a big wave and called me *Amio* and there was a big house they lived in that I was a visitor to and that was not mine. All the same it was a big house and I had many friends that visited me at the house and there was a stimulating festive atmosphere that did continue for a while.

## #25

Being splintered, I did things that were not of me. I went to Florida to visit my other mother's family, with my father and the baby. They were wealthy and lived in a wealthy house with a dumbwaiter and antiques and a screened-in swimming pool. To them, my father was working class, a thug, and me even less than that, being of him but small and only half-formed. I missed my guitar and watched palm trees and one night I drew a constellation on the beach in the sand, I was alone and it was my happiest moment in this place of privilege. I did not earn it or greatly desire it or even understand it, except to know that I was being condescended to, except to realize that these were would-be Mandarins, who hovered around the fringes of high society hoping to get in. I knew this by instinct.

## #26

A new school year was a new way of seeing and a new chance to move forward. I was sitting in a new class and on the other side of the class was a new girl. She was olive-skinned, had a dainty mouth and lustrous long black hair. Our eyes shot into each other and intermingled. I was aware of something changing and something moving and before long I had her number (and she mine) and we were confidants and romantic dialogists chatting away afternoons and evenings. Over the phone I played her the song called *Faith* that went *well I guess it would be nice if I could touch your body* and this had instant mythological significance as being a consummation of everything that subsisted between us. She cherished drama, in her Scorpio way, and so there were peaks and valleys of understanding and frequent miscommunication, but the feeling of a continuous humming presence between us, of which we could partake, went on.

## #27

Ted was a foil who could be leaned on and who liked to play straight man. I was a loon who needed a straight man, who would plan gags and make general mischief for teachers and those innocent enough to be duped. We wanted it to be atmospheric and ambient around us and we would burn my father's dhoop sticks and listen to rock music. This music came to symbolize the playfulness and the whimsy and the innocence and the elegance of what we imagined. The overabundance of my life seemed rich at this time: there was continuance.

## #28

Through music, words emerged in my consciousness as another thing. There were musicians who used words and they showed me. I saw that combinations of words could be molten and that the fires they ignited could be contagious. They could be a door that one could break through into another reality: a place hyper-real, full of things that had the palpable reality of what is called real, but were nonetheless better than real: voices channeled from ether, expounding heroic worlds of oceanic expansive experience. This was another way of moving fingers artfully; more subtle and durable, yet so much harder to do because so stark: mere imitation would get you nowhere. I was on the bottom of another mountain that would take me where the creek ran effortlessly.

## #29

I saw a movie at this time that had a powerful effect on me. It was all about one man's interior world. This world had a cohesion made of short-circuited dynamism and it meant that green jungle, severed heads, napalm memories and the poetry of endings (bangs, whimpers) would have to be preeminent. I learned how internal cohesion is rare and a magnet that others are drawn to: the more coherence (even if it happens to be irrational), the more magnetism. Yet being a magnet meant drawing good and bad together; internal levels had to be minded, picking and choosing was not an option. Life and death were seen to be flip sides of a coin, here on a dead man's eyes.



### #30

Images were entering my mind and leaving seeds. I saw a man dangle with hooks stuck into his chest. He was looking for visions and to become a channel for voices that would take him and his people forward. It was a ritual called *Sun Dance* and it was a kind of extremity. I learned that mortification of the flesh can be a boon to spirit and that valuing spirit can be more than an act of volitional faith: it can be a pact with another world. It was not volitional that I witnessed it but it was volitional that I believed and that a chord was struck within me. The receiver of visions could hold a place of honor; whether I saw what I saw in a creek or an Ibanez or a pen, the kind of seeing I was attuned to could move people from where they were to another place.

### #31

I liked the festive aspect of celebrations, and the little adventures one could set loose at a party: throwing glasses off buildings, smashing things, drinking forbidden alcohol. Driven by a delirious continuance, I put my hands all over girls' bodies. I prodded, pinched, teased, prolonged the experience any way I could. My will dovetailed with a wonted continuance and I was precocious: jacket off, tie loosened, a little wolf. I learned how to ride a high and how to direct cohesive energy into a palpable magnetic force.

## #32

I was in a train riding to Mahopac to visit relatives. It was an endless classic day in the endless classic summer of '89. The train broke down and I was sequestered in it for hours. There was no one in my car; I took out my guitar and began to play. I had a sensation of Otherness from being in an unfamiliar place, a place strictly liminal. I learned for the first time the magic of places that were not my home, were not destinations, and were in the middle of something. Though I couldn't feel the sunlight directly, there was warmth and a charm to the circumstances that I appreciated. Travel could help me to channel; Otherness could rejuvenate one's interior world; mishaps could be gateways to other realities.

### #33

I did not belong at camp anymore but I was still there. There were few happy moments but they all involved solitude. One night everyone had gone to a dance but I stayed behind. It started to rain furiously, a preternatural pounding such as you find in the mountains in summertime (and these were the Poconos). The rain was coming down and lit me up with magic. I put in a cassette I liked: The Cure. The music was thick, viscous, gothic, and had rain and woods and darkness in it. Everything coalesced and my solitude in a wooden cabin in the rain was perfect. A British counselor heard the music and stopped to commiserate and someone foreign affirming my taste was good, added to the ambience of the moment. I saw that perfect moments must be self-created to stick. What would be generated for me (dances, sports, entertainment) would not suffice.

### #34

The final insignia bequeathed to me by the camp realm: our bunk went camping, a few hours from the camp, deeper into the Pocono mountains themselves. We set up our sleeping bags in a secluded campground area. After a few cursory, desultory attempts at lighting a fire (our counselors being no more advanced at this than us), and long after sunset, we went to sleep. In the middle of the night, I was woken with a harsh push. Baptiste, from France, had a pack of Gauloise cigarettes. For us men of daring, it was now or never. Baptiste laughed at our stunted attempts at sophisticated inhalation— yet it didn't matter. For me, my first cigarette was an extension of acting, playing my guitar or baseball, and all the class-clowning I had down in school. I joined a continuum larger than myself, into a consciousness of bigness, expansiveness, largesse. I had accepted a token the universe (and Baptiste) had offered me, to reiterate what I already knew— somewhere out there was a real life waiting to be had, and the life was mine for the taking, if I dared.

### #35

I often remembered kindergarten: we would nap on the second floor of a two-story schoolhouse, and every day I would be unable to sleep, hoping to fall through the floor and land on ground level. On the last day of kindergarten I thought to myself, *this is the last chance, if I don't fall through today I never will*. I didn't, and it was my first experience of imagination being disappointed by concrete reality. Now, with words and music, I saw that I could build an imaginative world in which I could always fall through the floor. It would be a place of light and laughter and play and others would be invited in. I was aware of a new hunger for which this world was the only appeasement, and the world of sports and grades and television that surrounded me was but a dim reflection of it. My guitar and my books had grandeur that cast a shadow over everything and everyone that was ordinary or broken.

### #36

In Woodstock, New York, I met a writer, relative of a family friend. I sat beside him and listened to him discourse: drunkenly, cynically, and brilliantly. He took me on a tour of an imaginative landscape that he had created; it was all music and language and he had been rewarded with some fame but no money. I saw in a flash that to build the world I envisioned, I would have to give things up. The practical world could be a problem; as with this livid specimen, my giant wings might keep me from walking. My vision, if it was to continue, might take away evident signs of success and accomplishment, outward significations of approval that most people depended on. Not being normal would be a blessing and a curse.

### #37

I got a high from theater and from being onstage and I did many theater things in school. I was given starring roles because I was able to self-transcend and be other people effectively. Sometimes, in rehearsal, a mood would overtake me of complete giddiness, which was like being on a magic carpet. I was so completely beyond myself that I had ceased to be myself; a solid Otherness cohered in my consciousness. It was a way of flying and of being in an enriched world that had safety and surprise, stability and excitement, in it, simultaneously.



### #38

On the way to London I picked out a book to read. The flight was red-eye but I began to read and couldn't stop. I was reading a story of myself, of another me who was magically on a series of pages. The protagonist was me and his words were born of something that I could rightfully call my own. Oppressed by phoniness, harangued by clueless authorities, spinning through a maze of arbitrary circumstances, we flew over the Atlantic and were together. For the first time, a book had given me the gift of myself, and I found myself closer to me. I read straight into my hotel room, straight into a dream-extension of what I read, and words had demonstrated to me again their coherence and potentiality for continuity. Maybe I, too, could give people back themselves.

### #39

Cheltenham was a creepy town in the Cotswolds, but I had to go there to see a family grave. We stopped for tea at a teashop called Sweeney Todd's, and they were playing the song that went *stop dragging my, stop dragging my, stop dragging my heart around*. The graveyard was by a big old Gothic-looking church. Cruel April had abated; the sun shone. I could not give a dead man back to himself but maybe if I tried he would listen. *There might be another world*, I thought this as I wrote a poem and placed it by the headstone. Words could be a source of continuance between our world and the land of the dead. They could have timeless life.

## #40

As I walked around London, I had a camera on my person. We walked through Hyde Park; paused on a spot overlooking the Serpentine Lake. It coalesced into my brain— the word composition for such things not being in my head yet— that the way the lake looked in the mid and foreground, people seated on benches behind it, then more lawn, had a splendor or grandiosity to it, a sense of higher balance. I snapped the picture, and was initiated into the cult of the visual. This was mostly unconscious; only it turned out to be the universe's way of telling me that pictures and images, not just words and music, were to be part of my destiny and inheritance, too. For who I was at fourteen: my first work of genuine art.

## #41

Words about music were another kind of music that could reinforce the ethos, pathos, and logos of the music. Music and words became indissolubly combined in my mind, and thus they have remained.

## #42

N was the girl with the olive skin. We continued to dance around each other, loving but not committing ourselves. At a party at someone's house in Elkins Park, we went outside together and my hands were gripped by something and they went all over her. It was a big wave and it was coursing through me into her skin. I had no me, I was permeated by the feeling of two-in-one; the third that walked beside us took over. Yet, when I called the next day, N would not commit to it ever happening again, or even to continue going out. I had an intimation that this was to be my life: full of beautiful, difficult women. N was the first and an archetype that remains visible to me when I mate, or even meet, another beautiful, difficult woman that is for me. I have a muse, she is like this: recalcitrant and blue.

### #43

A kind of madness would not let me focus only on N. There were other parties and other girls: always the same wave, frisson, feeling of two-in-one. It would take many years to learn that this wave, powerful as it was, was short-lived. But contact with the feeling of this wave had so much of bliss in it that I sought it out at every opportunity, and grew petulant when forced to live without it. It only seemed to work on girls that were beautiful; otherwise I felt nothing. Lack of control was desirable but led me into non-continuity. What echoes of Tookany Creek were in this feeling created a hunger that was not to be assuaged; unlike music and words, this wave could not be relied upon, and the focus I felt for music and words was dissipated here. It was my misfortune to learn that continuance, as applied to art, could actively detract from continuance in other situations and on other levels.

## #44

That year, N wrote a long letter in my yearbook, that ended with *I love you*. I could sense, even then, that this *I love you* came from a much different place than other kids' effusions; this was a bittersweet testimony, not to placid or innocent attachment, but to strife, hardship, misunderstanding, piercing ecstasies and equally piercing sorrows. It was from an artist to an artist; it bore the stamp of aesthetic appreciation. N had reached down into the depths of her soul and her words had the weight of big breakers. I felt them land on me even as I tried to avert them. Yet, outwardly, we still wrestled; attaching, detaching, attaching again. What we wanted was freshness all the time, and each seemingly permanent detachment made coming together again more piquant. It was the friction of hard sex prolonged over time; we were more perverse and more subtle than we knew.

## #45

N and I found ourselves involved in something a little evil. N introduced a third party into our equation, specifically to heighten tension, underline drama, mix things up. He was innocent of our perversity and did not know he was being used. N took great pleasure in playing Catherine Earnshaw; we were to fight fiercely for the honor of her favor. This we did; however, I turned the tables on her by withdrawing my pledged affection. I did this purely to add interest to a scenario that was too soap opera even for me. Blood had been spilt; the third party was wounded by all of these intrigues. Somehow this blood stained us, and we were left with stricken consciences. The total effect was to cut off the continuance of the pure waves that passed between us. The construct of our togetherness vanished for the time being, to be returned to (necessarily with less perversity) later.



## #46

Through a strange process of mirroring, my Dad, also, found himself in a dalliance marked by perversity and thrill-seeking. He was disgruntled, living in a big house with a woman who had ceased to turn him on. The house was splintered; what began festively had now been abraded into a mere veneer of bourgeois success. Dad was on his own, pursuing a woman ten years his junior. She was married with two children, and she would bring them over and the pair would fondle while we all looked on aghast. This took considerable time to pick up steam. Initially, it was easy to sweep under the rug; these visits were infrequent. Yet, seeds of discontent had been planted; my Dad smelled new blood, and it drove him into despairs of sensual avarice. I was too young to see the storm-clouds for what they were; I did not understand adultery, what it meant, how it could destroy lives. What was brewing made the games I played with N look very tame indeed.

## #47

There was Ted and I and even though we were not of the same family somehow we shared blood. We each rebelled against our father by being like the others' father: mine was brutally masculine, gross, muscular and gruff; Ted's was literary, cultured and flirtatious. When Ted stayed over the doomed festive house, which was every weekend for two years, my Dad abused him mercilessly and Ted enjoyed it. Dad made Ted call him *your highness*, picked on Ted for getting rejected by popular girls, lectured him on sex-smells at midnight when we tried to watch *Saturday Night Live*, and made his own supremacy clear at each available juncture. He was feeding Ted's soul with the stuff of animal strength and it was a kind of intoxicant for Ted to imbibe; Ted was my straight man but was being fertilized for a kind of rebirth as an unrepentant, square-jawed jock. Thus, our blood was crossed.

## #48

We had many adventures, Ted and I, but the roles we played were always the same. I was Quixote to Ted's Sancho Panza. If we were pelted with snowballs or pelting others with snowballs, staring at girls or being stared at by girls, making prank calls or getting calls from friends, always it was my job to instigate the action, be a man of daring, direct our movements. Ted would consolidate our activity, provide focus. He was the solid man. When I would push things too far, he'd reign me in. We grew into adolescence as an odd couple par excellence; Ted quiet, me raging, Ted pliant, me baiting. However much of my father's dominance Ted internalized, I was still able to steer things when I wanted to. Unlike N, Ted had no taste for self-made drama; things (me included) came to him. There was a long time in which neither of us could imagine a withdrawal for any reason.

## #49

There was no reason for me to be at camp anymore: it was all sports, ball-sweat, and male camaraderie. I had become an artist and needed to be nurtured. My cabin was full of jocks and I was victimized and it was a nadir in my life. Yet I was tough enough that they couldn't beat me up and so physical abuse never happened. My only relief was a stage in a Recreation Hall on which I set up my gear and I would press the distortion button on my Peavey and empty myself completely. There were bats nested in the ceiling and a battered piano and it was the only congenial place on the camp grounds where my solitude was real. Random kids came in to listen and it might as well have been an activity that could be signed up for like volleyball or kayaking. The kids got a taste of continuance (stinging phrases, over and over) and I was shadow-bracketed.

## #50

Dad was becoming unsettled and unsettling. Frequent inexplicable rages degenerated into depressions; fits of distemper gave way to a kind of ecstasy, self-contained and silent. Had I been an adult, the situation would've been obvious to discern; Dad's got a new girlfriend. Responsibilities had been put on the backburner; two children and a wife had been secretly toppled in favor of fresh, feverish fucking. The mood of the house became bullet-riddled; everything he did was a shot, a substantiation of newly kindled potency. I was starting high school and do not remember feeling sanguine. There was an excitement to Dad's new heightened sensibility, but it was the excitement of grasped-for risk; it had no stability in it, and as I walked the halls of this new school I had nothing to hold onto. I tried to mirror Dad's excitement but my own potency felt shrunken by pain and the usual frustrations of being a freshman.

## #51

We had gone, briefly, to Disney World. Dad's ferment was obvious, but he muzzled it. One night, we were about to go to Epcot and I had the TV on. I saw a picture of a downed plane and the name of one of my then-heroes. I thought, of course, that he had been killed, and I entered a strange zone. I was sucked up into what felt like a void: my senses, materially unaltered, felt spiritually different, as if I was disconnected from the jubilant scenes that passed before my eyes (babies, families, six foot smiling rodents). Though it later turned out that it wasn't my hero who died, the other world I had entered, a void world, impressed me with its force and negative vivacity. Negativity, where this realm was concerned, was not the same as emotional depression; it was alienation from the condition of bodily awareness, and a realization of fluidities amidst seeming solidities. It was a taste of real death.

## #52

A superficial calm held the tenuous balance of things for a while. I went on long walks to buy guitar strings, listening to Pink Floyd bootlegs. One morning I overslept and was late for science class. I did not realize it, but I was afraid to wake up. There were too many changes in the air and I could not rest. Ted was not in any of my classes; neither was N. I felt deprived of security and safety. My youth assured that I did not realize, or half-realized I had these feelings. I imitated Dad's gruffness; I sneered like he did; I had a hard shell. I played so long and so intensely that my calloused cuticles bulged. This was when I finally got the hang of finger vibrato, the stumbling block that stops competent guitarists from becoming good. The sound of a sustained, vibrato-laden note was my sound: a cry in the dark.

### #53

One night, Dad came into my room later than usual. It was his habit to discourse, and I was his captive audience. He was bright; I listened. Tonight, he openly confessed to having a new girlfriend. She was “a little magic”. She was younger, had two kids. She was the woman he’d been groping over the summer. I was left to piece these things together. Dad insinuated that a move was imminent; as things developed, this woman’s magic would permeate, transform, and refurbish our lives. What could I say? Dad was eager for me to meet this magician, this enchantress. A date was set; we would have dinner, and I would see. There was no room to argue or maneuver, to dissuade. This was a fait accompli, a springboard to a higher level, rather than a descent into cruelty and greed. I wanted to believe Dad’s rhetoric rather than incur his ire, so I acquiesced. Things did not feel very magical.



## #54

Our dinner with the enchantress had the feel of a covert operation. We snuck out when no one was looking. It was a brisk night in early autumn; all light had vanished as we pulled into the parking lot of a Friday's-type joint. By this time, I had been allotted the role of father to my father; I was to oversee his actions, approve them, endure his impetuosity and confer forbearance on his enterprise. She was there; a slight, pretty lady in her early thirties. Her mouth, I noticed immediately, never closed; not because she was talking, but because she was perpetually startled, innocently shocked by everything. Just as I was overseeing Dad, he was overseeing her; manipulating her innocence into compliance, overwhelming her insecurities with certitude. He sat in the booth next to her, rather than across from her, and his hands weaved a determined path over all her pliant skin. He was playing to win.

## #55

Now all pretenses of normalcy and calm were dropped. Once I had conferred my (suddenly papal) blessing, my father's dynamism was terrific. We would move, he and I, into a new house with the enchantress and her two kids. Before I knew it the thing was arranged; a new house was waiting, of the same design, and right around the corner from the old one. The enchantress left her husband and my dad left his wife and their baby. This cyclone of activity insured that Dad and the enchantress never really got to know each other. The enchantress and I barely spoke at all. She was not bright; her lure was all physical. She was afraid of me like she was afraid of everything else. Dad held me to my paternal role. He professed to need me and I rationalized everything. Festive had given way to festering.

## #56

In the new house I had two small rooms: a bedroom and a “playroom” that I used for music. I had a Les Paul and insomnia and I would pace and play with no amp into the wee hours. It became known at Cheltenham that I was a guitar player and soon older kids were interested in me. Before long I was in a band. The other guys were older and had cars. I was a freshman and looked even younger. Yet I became more or less the leader. As with Ted, I became the Quixote, mad musical scientist: *Whipping Post*, the Smithereens. This was my first band but I knew instinctively our time together wouldn't be long. I learned that not everyone who plays has any real commitment to playing; some just do it to be cool, or because it's there, or to feel special. So I decided to give them only half of me; that's what I did.

## #57

A sense of things not being right manifested in the new house immediately. I had nothing to say to the enchantress or her children; they had nothing to say to me. Dad's gaiety became shrill and forced. I had no good advice for him; he had given me a role I could not begin to fulfill. Within six weeks, the enchantress and her children were gone, back to the husband and father they had abandoned. Dad and I were alone in a creepy house, a shadow of the one we had so lately left. Dad's reaction to this stunning failure was to ape superiority; that though everything had gone wrong it was not his responsibility. Others had let him down. He had always been flinty; he became flintier. I was overwhelmed by the feeling of having been involved in a spectacular mess; I felt and shared Dad's criminality, which he himself had (to and for himself) abjured. I bore the burdens that he would not.

## #58

Ted and I went to see *Dead Again* in Jenkintown. Continuance had been broken; we were in high school and had no classes together and did not see each other every weekend. Dad picked us up from the theater and tried to establish some of the old master/slave rapport with Ted. It didn't work; Ted played along, but the charm of the festive house had been overtaken by general creepiness and the feeling wasn't the same. Once we were home for the night I could see that Ted wanted to leave. There were ghosts and echoes here but not like Mill Road; these were ghosts created by lust, inconsideration, precipitance, and madness. Dad's new thing was to posit the whole experience as having been "no big deal"; he had no notion that others had been forced to experience anguish, on his behalf and at his behest.

## #59

Dad had a brother who was not significant, to him or me. He would show up for short periods of time: six months here, a year there, and then disappear again. However, he came to the new house with a prophecy. He had been to a psychic; the psychic had guessed my name, and predicted that I would soon reject Dad forever, and that if he wanted to salvage anything, he had better hurry up. It took a lot of nerve for my uncle to say this with both Dad and I sitting right there, but he did. Dad shrugged; I said it was bullshit; but it hit too close to home, and I made quick to leave the kitchen. I went down to my room and turned on the radio; *Great Gig in the Sky*. It was New Year's Eve, 1991.

## #60

By February, Dad and I were in an apartment a half-mile from the two houses. It was a drab space with low ceilings, narrow windows, and wooden floors. Dad slept a lot. Though I never saw her, the enchantress made frequent nocturnal visits. Catastrophe had left Dad's libido intact; she was apparently similar. One night, Dad had a friend over and they commenced to make fun of my musical aspirations. If I followed music through, they said, I'd wind up working in a gas station. This was said as a quip and caused great hilarity. I was devastated, not realizing the incredible cowardice and cruelty of disappointed men. I was not prone to tears but I wept bitterly. I felt like I'd been hit by a typhoon, and I had. In a way, though, this was good. It gave momentum to something that was building inside of me. I saw the absurdity of being my father's father and his whipping boy as well. Something had to be done, but I didn't know what. Winter slogged on.

## #61

It was around the time of Dad's birthday: April 28. I asked him what he wanted; he said he didn't know. He suggested we go to a bookstore and he'd pick something out. We went to a bookstore and he didn't pick anything out. The next day was April 28 and I didn't have a present for him. He flew into a rage; I was hit with a typhoon again. *You make me feel like shit*, he bellowed. Only, rage made him happy and secure. He was fine. I was the one who felt like shit. I was a father who couldn't please an adolescent son who was my father. Things were nearing a peak of misery; for the first time in my life, I was hitting a wall that I knew I could never get over. Something major had to change, or damages would start to become irreparable. How could I play, develop, grow, in an atmosphere like this? Dad would be in my face, willy-nilly; my guitar needed to be actively courted, continually pursued. I would either be abused or leave. The path of my departure was free.



## #62

Ted's birthday was in early May and he had a party. Ted's house on Woodlawn Avenue had a front façade of windows which ran the length of the house, which was not set on a hill but also had a large white shed attendant on the backyard. It was my fate, in a year's time, to smoke pot there for the first time. Woodlawn Avenue, as privatized as my stretch of Mill Road which was not far away (though Mill Road was only a memory then), did a rustic trick, inside and outside of Ted's house, of making everything crepuscular. A sunset realm. N was there, in shorts and a tee-shirt. Everyone was watching *Die Hard* but I put my left hand on N's bare right knee. It was very forward and she didn't resist. The spring twilight had enchanted us. The creek ran. Fate had decreed, in N's acceptance of my hand, that I would gain, finally, a girlfriend, and lose a father. The party would end but she was mine. I decided; I would never go back to Dad's apartment again. My Mom had been waiting patiently for me to see through his posturing; now, I did. I knew all this while everyone watched the movie and N smiled in her Scorpio way. That Sunday, Dad called to ask when I'd be coming home, but it was too late. The next time I entered Dad's apartment, it was to collect my stuff; he wasn't even there. I was ready to live on Old Farm Road with Mom, ready to be young again and to live however I wanted, without fear of random senseless typhoons blowing me over. The credits rolled; Ted shot me a look of clean dirtiness. This was the end of my beginning; in my beginning was no end.

APPARITION POEMS: BLAZEVOX, 2010

#1065

Black-shirted,  
bright eyes in  
dream-blues,  
parents dead  
of a car crash,  
I kissed her so  
long I felt as if  
I would crash,  
South Street  
loud around  
us, lips soft—

#1066

A patch of white light  
appeared on my wall  
late last night. It was  
no shadow.

I thought  
it might be a cross, I  
thought it might be a  
sign, but by the time  
I turned my head, it  
was gone.

I thought

#1067

I want to last—  
to be the last  
of the last of  
the last to be

taken by time,  
but the thing  
about time is  
that it wants,

what it wants  
is us, all of us  
wane quickly  
for all time's

ways, sans "I," what I wants—

#1069

There comes a time  
history's viability in  
impressing us goes

out our mind's eye,  
we are ghosts then,  
we join the "rest of,"

until someone's lips  
hips us to secrets, in  
case we forgot, that

nothing ever happed,  
nothing ever got writ.

#1070

I said, "I can't  
even remember  
the last time I  
was excited, how  
can I associate  
ideas?"

She pulled  
out a gun, a tube  
of oil, and an air  
cushion,

and it was  
a spontaneous  
overflow,

powerfully  
felt, in which we  
reaped together—

#1080

If I had Neko Case  
for one night, I'd  
dip her red hair in  
red wine, suck it  
dry, bathe  
her in  
honey,  
dive  
into what's  
pink and blue,  
roll out the red carpet.

If I had Neko Case  
for one night, I'd  
part the Red Sea  
to make her  
come, come  
pangs,  
needles,  
she's  
stiff from  
ecstasy, I'm  
freckle-fucked.

If I had Neko Case  
I would never  
leave my bed  
again; I'd lay,  
awake to  
music,  
voices,  
ether,  
never doubt  
Heaven exists  
on Earth, between  
throats, notes, legs.

#1083

Is art slightly less  
stupid than every-  
thing else?

    I am more  
    moved by  
    flesh, and  
    stupidly,  
how easily  
some skin  
peels off  
    layers of text—  
“company of blood,”  
Lucy on a bed  
    with diamonds—

#1084

Poems are train-wrecks  
    that move— to stand  
on tracks, to do so solidly, is  
    suicide of a high order—

to die by force of wreckage—

#1085

Metaphysics of Facebook—  
how many pictures can one  
woman upload?

    She sits on a  
shag carpet, or, in a leotard,  
dances, or drinks a beer, arm  
around a disheveled mate—  
    all possible selves  
    captured for Net  
priceless and free  
discrete but not—

#1089

I love you,  
I love you,  
I love you—

clouds are  
moving in  
behind us,

storms are  
forming in  
front, blue

sky purple,  
green grass  
yellow, all

things pale  
to this dark—

#1103

As a child, I  
reached up,  
towards my  
Mother; as

a man, as I  
reach, I am  
deep down  
in earth, or

I reach out  
to find air,  
nothing to  
mother me,

emptiness,  
soot & ash.

#1117

Sometimes you write  
from ocean's bottom,  
blue waters bury you,

an octopus comes to  
give you ink, tentacle  
words, fortitude for

battles to get back on  
the surface, where you  
must fight to get past

jellyfish blocks, tears—

#1121

How I wanted her!  
Everything pointed  
me into her—

gossamer silk  
over her belly  
black panties  
head turned  
towards me—

I nailed her to my wall,  
I nailed her—

she never forgave me



#1134

It is by dint of great labor  
that lines heap up on one  
another (enjambéd or not),

it is by dint of great labor  
that they take on the cast,  
die, substance that sticks,

it is by dint of great labor  
that poets must forget this,  
because to stick means not

to stick, it means to loosen  
perpetually out of grooves,  
let things topple into place,

let shapes manifest slowly,  
let life meander, be rolling—

#1145

The Tower of Verse  
is a Babel, no one pays  
their rent, many leap  
from windows to sure  
death, many leave, yet  
there is a strange sense  
of satisfaction given to  
those who stay, and it  
is merely this—

clean windows  
allow us to see  
wisps of smoke,  
(grey, red, turbid)  
rise from ashes—

#1148

September sunlight,  
  
elegiac as collapsed  
ruins, festival ashes,  
  
nooks where hidden  
lovers laid, tasting  
  
wine on one another's  
breath, piercing silk  
  
layers, springing up,  
ruddy, fulsome, like  
  
little flesh harvests—

#1155

September leaves hang on—  
  
    loads about to be blown  
into black concrete wombs  
  
fretted by windy displacements

#1168

The essential philosophical question  
    is incredibly stupid—  
why is it that things happen? You can  
    ask a thousand times,  
it won't matter— nothing does, except  
    these things that  
keep happening, “around” philosophy.

**#1180**

I went with her on  
a daytrip inside her  
head; there were kids'  
toys, storybooks, red  
monsters, fire trucks,  
silver streaks, stairs,  
rooms everywhere, it  
was a funhouse, but  
in each mirror she  
looked different, and  
I couldn't see myself—

**#1209**

Poems with “I” and “she”  
are older than the galaxy,  
have power to rivet me,  
because there is no “I”  
for me without a “she,”  
even if I feminize this  
highly vaginal computer  
screen, my seminal hands—

#1223

She was seated at a desk,  
giving a dramatic speech  
(pronounced with acidic  
bitterness), glaring at me,  
I was punching a telephone,  
trying to reach Dominique  
who had given me a phony  
number, while two young,  
androgynous sprites made  
love in a chair, Leonard  
joined my committee—

she was seated at a desk,  
her voice rose to a pitch I  
couldn't tolerate, but also  
it brought me to the verge  
of orgasm, because she was  
sucking myself out of me,  
doing it psychically, when I  
woke up, she was updating  
her Face about lost sleep—

#1241

Why does no one tell the truth?  
Because the truth is (more often  
than not) absurd. No one wants  
to look absurd, so no one tells  
the truth, which creates even  
more absurdity; worlds grow  
into self-parody, systems grow  
down into gutters, whole epochs  
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra  
finally opens her mouth, no one  
listens, they want her to star in  
a porno, set her up with a stage-  
name, she learns not to rant,  
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1249

Despite what I write, there's  
not much sex in the world—  
walk down Walnut Street,  
take an inventory— how  
much sex are these people  
getting? This one fat, this  
one ugly, this one old, this  
one a baby, a couple married  
twenty years, or ten, or five—  
not much sex in these lives.  
But media, movies thrive  
on representing this tiny  
demographic: single, young,  
promiscuous. Crowds come.

#1261

If I were a rock star, I'd  
take a flight to Singapore,  
hoist you up to "Imperial  
Suite" in a swank hotel,  
turn on a Jacuzzi, order  
up some caviar (which I  
don't even like, but no  
matter), we'd take our  
clothes off, conceive a  
child right there, which  
we'd raise from Imperial  
Suite, and my World Tour  
would begin right there,  
would go on forever—

#1281

You can take for granted  
lots of God-awful garbage  
in places deemed important  
by fools; this goes for every  
thing, including poetry. Why?  
Because the world runs (has,  
will always) on mediocrity, so  
safe, so comforting, like a mug  
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,  
or a mediocre simile, people want  
others to be mediocre, to be fools,  
that's just the way things go, people  
are nothing to write home about, or  
(if you are writing to God) nothing to  
write about at all, the world is no mystery,  
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

#1288

Times you get bored  
with the process, but  
  
worse are times when  
words are little deaths,  
  
wrung out like sheets,  
draped over hangers,  
  
out in a damp yard on  
a cold autumn day, as  
  
wind rises to pin them  
to your hopeless breast.

#1303

Philly: I duck punches,  
land them from a pink-  
flesh moon. Fists don't  
know me, hung like an  
Exit sign. This city hell  
I write against, windows  
shuttered up, visionary  
deadness, decayed tufts,  
I'll ride it out in needles  
poised on waves, poison  
apples bitten into like so  
many razors in disguise,  
silver. Tumble into light  
shafts, ratty entrances out.

#1307

She hovers above planet  
Earth, making strategies  
for safe landings, but not  
able to see that she is also  
on planet Earth, watched  
like a crazed cat, a maze-  
rat, or a tied-up mime, I  
cannot save someone so  
high up or far down, it's  
like a black thread about  
to snap, as it strains past  
breaking point she reaches  
for champagne, to celebrate—  
bubbles lunge up to break.

#1313

we can't stop trying to conceive,  
even though our bodies are dead  
to each other, and nightly deaths  
I took for granted are razors in a  
    part of my flesh that  
        can never live again—  
certain possessions possess us.

#1316

Hunters get smitten with their prey,  
but to kill is such an amazing rush  
who could possibly resist, I'm into  
these thoughts because you dazzle  
me away from words into your red  
pulpy depths, which I resent, but I  
can do nothing about, because you  
have nails in your cunt and crucifix  
in your mouth, when I come I'm a  
perfect personal Jesus, but the gash  
is all yours, did I mention I love you?

#1326

Before the sun rises,  
streets in Philly have  
this sheen, different  
than at midnight, as  
the nascent day holds  
back its presence, but  
makes itself felt in air  
like breathable crystal—  
    no one can tell me  
    I'm not living my  
    life to the full.



**#1327**

She said, you want Sister  
Lovers, you son of a bitch,  
pouted on a beige couch in  
Plastic City, I said, I want  
Sister Lovers, but I'm not  
a son of a bitch, and I can  
prove it (I drooled slightly),  
took it out and we made  
such spectacular love that  
the couch turned blue from  
our intensity, but I had to  
wear a mask because I'd  
been warned that this girl  
was, herself, a son of a bitch—

**#1328**

The girl on the trolley  
had pitch black hair,  
eyes to match, I got  
her vibes instantly—  
    so, what do we  
    want to do? Do  
    we want to do  
    this? Is it OK?  
took her back here  
took her clothes off  
took her not gently  
    I'll never take the 34 again—

**#1330**

When the sky brightens slightly  
into navy blue, “what’s the use”  
says the empty street to parking  
lots elevated four stories above.

#1335

terse as this is, it is  
given to us in bits  
carelessly shorn  
from rocky slopes,  
of this I can only  
say nothing comes  
with things built in,  
it's always sharp edges,  
crevices, crags, precipice,  
abrupt plunges into "wants,"  
what subsists between us  
happens in canyons lined  
in blue waters where this  
slides down to a dense  
bottom, I can't retrieve  
you twice in the same  
way, it must be terse  
because real is terse,  
tense because it's so  
frail, pine cones held  
in a child's hand, snapped.

#1339

house with ivy  
wooden door,  
yellow kitchen,  
clunky dresser  
on which she displayed all  
kinds of tricks, nights were  
young, strong, climactic in  
this place, sex,  
green buds, all  
this here, I'm a  
kid, as a man, I  
look at this, can't sense  
much who I was, why I  
ended this, if it is an end—

**#1340**

Arms folded over chest  
(as the man on the four of  
Swords), she paints inside  
a box-like carven space,  
(dank edges only seen on  
the outside), light filters in  
from small square windows,  
I hover over her, I'm this  
that she wants, but what  
she needs is to once again  
feel what avalanches can't  
reach this head so full of  
color, ribbons, blueness.

**#1341**

Secrets whispered behind us  
have a cheapness to bind us  
to liquors, but may blind us  
to possibilities of what deep  
secrets are lost in pursuit of  
an ultimate drunkenness that  
reflects off surfaces like dead  
fishes at the bottom of filthy  
rivers— what goes up most is  
just the imperviousness gained  
by walking down streets, tipsy,  
which I did as I said this to her,  
over the Schuylkill, two fishes.

#1342

What's in what eyes?  
What I see in hers is  
mixed greenish silence,  
somewhat garish, it's  
past girlish (not much),  
but I can't touch her  
flesh (set to self-destruct),  
anymore than she can  
understand the book  
her cunt is, that no one  
reads directly, or speaks  
of, there's no love other  
than "could be," but I  
think of her throat cut—  
that's her slice of smut.

#1343

This process of leaping  
happens between lines,  
like a fish that baits its  
own hooks; heights in  
depth, depths of height,  
all colliding in a mesh of  
net cast only for a fish to  
bring it down on itself, so  
that others swim out past—  
I don't mean myself in this.

**#1345**

Two hedgerows with a little path  
between— to walk in the path like  
some do, as if no other viable route  
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows  
that make your life tiny, is a sin of  
some significance in a world where  
hedgerows can be approached from  
any side— I said this to a man who  
bore seeds to an open space, and he  
nodded to someone else and whistled  
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

**#1470**

I leaned out into the breeze (no  
cars impinging on any side), did  
not spit but let myself be blown  
back, knowing that vistas opened  
when I did so, appreciating what  
was infinite in this small moment,  
an old song on the radio, a breeze,  
a moving car (me at the wheel), all  
simple, succinct, clear, crisp, cutting,  
what blood came out was nourished  
by the open air, came back in again.

#1473

Passages that shudder between  
blackness between legs between  
what moves (taps head) between  
us like this (taps head again) hints  
she may not be the animal bride I'm  
looking for (by this I mean seed carrier,  
not the same as mother-for-kids, almost),  
what's between what used to be between

us, what now is, is between her, others who  
have more claim to be animal brides, but she's  
here, that's the key, here now, actually, which may  
be all that matters, if to matter is to lie back, legs  
apart, between being, becoming, moving, removing  
all barriers, fences, boundaries, expenses to move again.

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—  
do these things we do have  
any resonance, do they rise  
into the ether, or are they to  
be ground down into pulp,  
briefly making earth sodden,  
then dissipated dust scattered  
over plains too vast, blasted  
with winds, rains, storms, to  
be counted or harvested?

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there  
are people in the world with no  
soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces,  
dead end interiors, permanently  
frozen faculties, how horrendous  
to watch how they borrow words  
of others to sound profound, but  
each echo reveals there's nothing  
behind it but the kind of charred  
silence that comes after a corpse  
is burnt— how horrendous, how  
it makes some of us cling to what  
we feel, how we feel, that we feel,  
and that everything we feel is so  
precious, specifically (and only)  
because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1488

liquor store, linoleum  
floor, wine she chose  
    was always deep red,  
    dark, bitter aftertaste,  
    unlike her bare torso,  
        which has in it  
        all that ever was  
        of drunkenness—  
to miss someone terribly,  
to both still be in love, as  
she severs things because  
    she thinks she must—  
    exquisite torture, it's  
    a different bare torso,  
(my own) that's incarnadine—

#1491

To wake up in frost,  
ineffectual sun up in  
blue sky bruised gray,  
is to huddle into these  
words, burrow down in  
them until you hit a spot  
of warmth, like memories  
stuck like bark to roots,  
of this or that, of she or  
her, if this trope is over-  
worn so be it, I've had  
enough of pretending  
this crux isn't one, so  
I'll lean into it, again—

#1497

nothingness grows vast,  
nothingness tastes sweet  
only for ten seconds— of

this, depth without depth,  
crass substitute for realms  
of total glory she effaces

(once spilled milk cries)  
like a chalk-stain on blue  
jeans, a just-smoked joint.



#1506

New Years Day—

sky is same as its  
been, perched in  
perfect beauty in  
search of a better  
place (power lines  
cut it off), it hurts  
to know all other  
places exist than  
this, visionary as

this deadness is.

#1507

The importance of elsewhere,  
Larkin wrote, but didn't name  
money as the reason for none  
(no elsewhere), iron brutalities  
forge fences around my words—

these buildings are neuroses, I  
can't see them without a desire  
to take pills, drinks, anything to  
free me from ugly hegemonies—

**#1509**

Myths are made of us, we  
who spin myths from this  
happenstance life, which is  
hewn of rocks, books, lies,  
truths, loves, hangings of  
all these things, in myths  
we are heroes, braggarts,  
martyrs, rogues, angels,  
murderers and assholes,  
but myths go on sans us,  
who only wanted slightly  
more than Gods gave us,  
& so made ourselves Gods,  
bugger any odds against us.

**#1510**

Sky of mud, what we  
have placed in you is  
much more rank than  
any rapist ever put in  
prone woman— like  
a race of rapists, we  
have prowled earth in  
search of womb-like  
comforts, sent vapors  
into ether just to get  
someplace sans loss  
of time, expense; for  
us, no defense, death—  
as rapists, caged, gored.

#1511

steps up to my flat, on  
which we sat, tongues  
flailed like fins, on sea  
of you, not me, but we  
thought (or I thought)  
there'd be reprieve in  
between yours, for us  
to combine, you were  
terribly vicious, this is  
our end (here, amidst  
I and I), does she even  
remember this, obscure  
island, lost in Atlantis?

#1512

Do you  
know I

tried to  
reach, I

did, but  
you're a

far away  
planet, I

can't, its  
rings all

around, I  
can't see

surface, I  
want to,

can you  
change

orbits  
for me  
once?

#1514

You can't  
get it when  
you want it,  
but when I  
want it I get  
it; she rolled  
over on her  
belly, which  
was very full,  
and slept; its  
just shadows  
on the wall, I  
thought, dark.

#1516

I climb over  
you, onto me,  
but me is not  
the "I" I want

it to be, climb  
down, rafters  
heave, wood  
slats, fences,

all this is you,  
already over  
& beyond, is  
this fairness?

#1519

She says she  
wants babies

from me, she  
sends this to

me, nudging  
my body in a

straight line I  
recognize for

its blue streak,  
I'll give her a

baby, I say, it's  
part of a plan,

indecipherable—

**#1520**

This posse wants “success,” in  
all the wrong ways— down by  
the old corral, I had a shoot-out  
with the leader, who gave his girl  
black eyes, battered thoughts, but  
she’s devoted, because she counts  
“success” on the wrong fingers, I  
hated to see her get trampled by a  
buffalo herd— anyway, ten paces,  
I nailed him right in the heart, but  
wasn’t bothered, that part of him  
never worked to begin with. Eat  
dust, I said in parting, write about  
how it tastes, you might “make it”  
after all, but keep it in your mouth.

**#1524**

Poems: do this every day, it  
becomes like roulette without  
being (or seeming) Russian; if  
you go here what happens, if  
you move your knight onto a  
new square can you take all the  
pawns (at once, even, why not  
be ambitious?), not everyone is  
simpatico, the knights often say  
they're kings, the board is clay.

**#1529**

I'm having a better time now,  
I told her, its unfortunate that  
you were happier fifteen years  
ago, but you certainly had your  
chance, those days we sat next  
each other different places, and  
of course your best friend the  
idiot, Queen of Sheba, now here  
you are back hot to fool around,  
suddenly I call the shots, I'm a  
real hot-shot, there's a shot we  
might actually shoot each other,  
because violence is what you want—  
she unzipped her dress, frowning.

#1533

So much gets involved with  
this that isn't this, that what  
this is gets lost, whatever it  
is, which no one knows, but  
that "I" is in it somewhere  
(no one knows where), there  
must be a "you" (if it's art,  
as it may or may not be), so  
two bases are covered, like  
two breasts of a mother  
weaning her young, and  
whether or not we are made  
young by this is another good  
question: we may be, maybe.

#1536

Facebook girls commit  
acts of virtual adultery  
every day, wanton acts  
of exhibitionism, sucks  
of minor stars in tiny  
firmaments, I've got  
them (Facebook girls),  
in virtual corners in  
virtual states of undress  
virtually shagging my  
arse off— stick it in,  
like a screwdriver into  
a keyboard, in & out,  
in virtual light & heat.



#1542

“This art game is funny, it’s  
all about staring at walls at  
night, connecting blue dots  
of consciousness, fitting in  
pieces to your own puzzle  
that may or may not be at  
all comprehensible,”

I didn’t wait for him to listen  
I was watching the walls

#1543

What could be more crass  
than a round-trip ticket to  
Los Angeles? Nothing but  
beds of starlets, flawless in  
perfect color harmony but  
vomit stains in the toilet, I  
don’t know what could be  
more crass, in fact I don’t  
know anything anymore, I  
think the sky is marvelous.

#1546

What a tussle it was, I  
could only see her eyes,  
tiny bits of red above,  
stark, blank blueness, I  
felt animal fear between  
us, but a poltergeist was  
pushing our bodies into  
one another, dead flesh  
inhabited by spirits, for  
the time nothing came  
from our mouths, dead  
liveliness, deep into the  
wolf’s hour this went on—  
our eyes couldn’t close.

#1549

Think of these in terms  
of vertical movements—  
what goes up or doesn't.

Does this go up? It may,  
if it creates something I  
feel is not "in the world"

yet, but it must also have  
solid roots in the world  
to be something else, it

must acknowledge what  
can be called horizontal.  
The best poems are zig-

zags, lightning bolts, that  
go from side to side, up  
at the same time. This is

a meta-bolt, but whether  
it "goes" is up to you alone.

#1550

I'm in your house:  
your husband, kids  
not home. A voice  
(yours) follows me  
around, playing on  
my body, until I'm  
in your bathroom,  
smoking butts on

a sunny spring day.  
Your body doesn't  
appear. It seems to  
me you're suspect,  
Steph, it seems to  
me you want too  
much. Then, you  
always said I was

a dreamer. What  
do we have past  
dreams anyway?  
What else is love?

#1552

Your name grows, as it grows  
your fame grows, as it grows it  
becomes clear you're not who  
you are, you exist in people's  
heads as something Other, I  
heard this from someone at a  
time when I did not exist, now  
that I exist I exist as something  
Other, but I can see into some  
people's heads, and the "I" that  
I am is amused by the "you": an  
otter (might as well be), ox, fox,  
dragon, dog, pig, jackal, hyena,  
anything but an actual human.

#1553

I see her head, not yours,  
on my pillow, dear, but I  
don't really see either one  
of you except as you were  
when you had no interest  
in my pillows: isn't it sad?

#1557

Since you are a scorpion  
that stings herself to death,  
after so many stings, redness  
never leaves my joints, I feel  
zilch. I call this *your* passionate  
time, as I have no intent of  
tempting the scorpion again.  
I've seen nests for you all over  
Philly, from Front Street right  
up to Baltimore, and you know  
what? You might finally get the  
death you want. A sultry night,  
desert all around, legs akimbo.

#1558

This is meant to be  
level on level, layer  
on layer, like insides  
of mountains, but I  
only have so many,  
& when something  
takes over, I drop a  
little lower, my guts  
drop too, and days I  
could reach out for  
you have gone. Well,  
I call that level hell.

**#1562**

“In Your Eyes,” the song goes,  
“the resolution of all my fruitless  
searches,” only what I see in your

eyes *is* fruitless, and what Shelley  
might have called “luminous green  
orbs” look like turbid wastelands,

capable of ruining any day I might  
have you nipping at my heels. This  
is what I think about her, but don’t

dare say, she’s too young to know  
anything about wastelands, I’m an  
old scorpion with mud of my own.

**#1563**

If poetry makes nothing happen,  
there is no “great political poetry  
tradition,” so I yawp no “O any-  
thing” to anyone who is not my  
captain, and whose position is not  
in any way tenable; no one (that I  
know) has any excuses, we forge  
ahead regardless, Nero’s fiddle is  
sounding in the distance, personal  
habits of Romans have entered our  
lives, but I have this time to write  
this and if you like it, is it enough?

#1565

Since no one  
wants to eat  
shit, we give  
our shit to  
the Earth,  
it's still shit,  
to eat it  
means  
that's what  
we think  
of Earth  
(less than  
us), Earth  
is more  
God to  
us than  
anything—  
who wants  
to hear  
the truth  
of this?

#1571

To cut right to the bone—  
there is no bone in this,  
it's mirrors, echoes, bits,  
more than play, less than

life, but anything limiting  
this needs to be chucked  
like fruit rinds into a bin,  
any arbitrary signifier that

knows itself to be arbitrary  
can *work* as mirrors, echoes,  
bits, if you have faith that  
what's ineffable counts, is.

**#1573**

This guy thinks he knows  
what's really real, writes a  
book, I do the same thing:  
but whoever says this is in  
a chain of unreality which  
reality will quickly undo: I  
know whoever says this is  
lost in a maze of illusions,  
which must be stymied: it's  
something you only say if  
you're deluded; but then it  
means you know you're in  
a maze of delusions, which  
is what's really real: a bitch.

**#1574**

There you are: towel-headed,  
toweled, milling through large  
crowds, slightly self-conscious  
but convinced of your uppity  
superiority— this you is me, I  
push through crowds (antique  
book stores, solicitous clerks, I  
can't tell if they mean me when  
they speak), stumble up stairs,  
nobody notices the freakishness  
of my appearance, as I am you—  
having lived your life, I'm past  
your death— cogs cut, dusted.

#1576

Who told poets to be poets?  
Nobody tells anyone things  
like this anymore— Poetess,  
she comes to me with “this,”  
it’s all wine and roses for two  
nights, but I’m left dizzy— is  
this the end of poetry? There’s  
a war between poetry & sex, it’s  
always sex’s dominance we fight,  
she tells me this, but we still make  
love. And it’s good & hard. I’m  
pure in this, I tell myself. I know  
what I’m doing. I do, too, in ways  
limited by perspectives, of which  
this is half of one. Is it enough?

#1577

The poets around me say  
one thing repeatedly: “not  
enough,” and with force I  
used to not be able to take,  
but what their enough is is  
all pride, prejudice, lies, all  
sorts of cowardice, dying  
limbs, fried brains, the lot  
of Satan’s syndromes, and  
I (being lowly wise), stay as  
low to the riverbed, listening  
to sphere-music they can’t  
hear, but who cares about us?



**#1580**

“Waiting for the heavens to fall,  
what can I do with this call,” this  
asinine pop song was written by  
me in a dream of you where you  
called me (obviously), took to be  
already granted what I haven’t  
given to you yet, but experience,  
my love, is the only thing worth  
giving, and I’ve got that from  
you in spades, so when heaven  
falls we’ll catch it, lay it between  
our sheets, dirty as they must be—

**#1582**

To send bodies up into ether  
(what does this no one knows)  
all flesh become hands that can  
clasp (ecstasy of joining things),

to be joined to a part that you  
suspected evil of, but is really  
only love, is to give thanks for  
raised curtains which (sadly) are

doused in your own blood, & as  
I join this exultant spirit, doused  
in white light, I’m steeped in my  
own darkness, death, excrement.

#1583

I was on Pine Street outside  
the Drop, I looked, saw this  
girl (maybe nineteen, twenty)  
in black (not morbid black,  
just normal clothes), I turned  
for a split second, then when  
I looked she had disappeared—  
this (for once) was visionary  
life, but the Drop was still  
the Drop, I walked out with  
the Yeah Yeah Yeahs on my  
I-Pod, as I grow richer every  
thing, everyone deteriorates:  
I wore black the next day.

#1584

“The condition of being kidnapped  
by angels: that’s what good art must  
impose on a willing audience.” Who  
was this guy talking to? Are we meant  
to believe this Romantic bullshit? Ah,  
who cares, it’ll pass. He was walking  
his dog, thinking. It was a sunny day  
in suburbia. The concrete really was  
(and I mean this) concrete. But this  
is the thing: I do believe what this  
guy says, his Romantic bullshit. I  
see things, you know what I mean?

**#1596**

I was talking to a dude  
I knew from school, I  
said, "I see the levels  
from sleeping with  
psychopaths, that's  
how I get them," levels  
were (I meant) places  
between souls where  
spaces open for metaphor,  
"but when I carry them  
over to my bed, every  
psychopath levels me."

**#1601**

What words get sent up  
on sharp frequencies are  
fractious, bent from pain,  
Hephaestus in iron-groans,  
what goes up sticks around,  
so that base/top get covered,

all things resonate like pitch-  
forks, tweaked by conductors  
before their final, triumphant  
performance for a hall empty  
of bodies, filled to capacity.

## #1602

I stepped like a mantis off this ship  
of fools, felt around for prey, found  
a plate of ants to put in a microwave,  
I saw how they scurried briefly, put it  
into text that had the heat of ovens in  
it, shipped this text across vast oceans,  
it preyed on suspicions, was placed on  
plates, now that I have prayed, I am (or  
may be) redeemed, but every step I take  
feels like a scurry, as the fools are more  
numerous than I thought, just like ants.

## #1603

“Be careful what you handle,”  
I told her, “you can get to me  
even if you touch another,” it  
happened in an office shaped  
like the foyer of a huge hovel,  
built of mud, etchings of bugs  
on the wall, perfect perverse  
kids scampering among clods.

“You know what I want, and  
how I can get it,” she replied,  
as she took another out, put  
me in, but only inside a brain  
used amiss to find a level that,  
shaped like a foyer, was past  
office, into brick, sans mud.

## #1604

Here's where shifts (red shifts)  
happen in perspective, I thought,  
slopping dark meat onto my plate,  
here's where angles converge to  
put me past the nest. General  
laughter over pictures, womb-  
like spaces, but I was in hers as  
I was in with them. It hurts, but  
he's dead, I never met him. It's  
a shame, I never met him. Blood  
moves through air: between her,  
me, them— leaves on concrete.

## #1605

This killer wears a tight  
black shirt, glasses. There  
are noises of digging happening  
from the bathroom, she's in  
bed, hands over her mouth,  
frozen upset. Then, the mirror  
is dug through, his face appears  
in a wall with a square cut in it.  
The face is there, hovers there,  
just sits, it has the promise of  
action that kills. This is the  
tableau I watch every time  
I'm in the bathroom while  
she's in bed. And smile.

## #1607

Every live body has a dialect:  
to the extent that bodies are  
in the process of effacing both  
themselves, what they efface, I  
move past dialect to the extent  
that there are no no-brainers  
here, what's moral in this is the  
belief that properly used dialects  
emanate waves to hold bodies  
in place. As to who's saying this,  
I heard this on the street last  
night after a few drinks with  
an ex at Dirty Frank's. It was  
a bum who meant it, it worked.

## #1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:  
to the extent that the hill is  
constituted already by kinds  
of knives, to what extent can  
a man go up a hill, shepherd  
a son to be sacrificed, to be  
worthy before an almighty  
power that may or may not  
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were  
concerned, but how, as I watch  
this, can I not feel that Abraham,  
by braving knives, does not need  
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.  
What are conditions of losing: to whom?  
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,  
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of  
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) "loss." I took this  
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness  
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof  
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1620

I'm looking  
at the sky, writing  
like a man writes  
when the sister  
lives in an apartment  
with a husband  
three blocks away,  
casts her body over  
here to do what  
cannot be done  
ad infinitum;  
and that the evil  
I saw in this family  
was hers, the scourge  
who ruined my life.  
That night I had her  
in summer's sweat,  
what it should've  
been, what it was,  
the sting of it lingers,  
all in the sister, & for  
once I don't dare  
bifurcate myself,  
they do it for me,  
naturally.

## #1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:  
all in the will is a fight to beat  
other wills. I see him in his  
meager room, his will bent  
not to do much, save himself  
the trouble of fighting these  
ineluctable battles, but not  
able to refrain from eating,  
breathing, shitting, fucking,  
all those simple acts that are  
will-to-survival, but Arthur  
casts himself into a future of  
power, not knowing when it  
arrived it was to be a crass joke,  
ended with face in turtle soup.

## #1625

The "I" that writes cannot be  
(he told us, perched on a hill of  
flowers which he crushed, but, of  
course, incompletely, and not all of  
them at once) strictly for-itself as it  
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side  
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but  
only briefly, leaning forward so that a  
row of buttercups doused him yellow.  
The "I" that writes has a relationship  
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that  
what constitutes a human "I" has no  
meaning for it. Now, you need to know  
this: I was not the student with the razor,  
but I supplied the razor to the student  
that cut the professor's forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.



**#1625**

I ask you this here, while I look down on you, as  
you look up at me, and the different ups & downs  
of us play themselves out, so that if, while being in  
this state, we are in and out of each other, all streaks  
of blues, grays, blacks can be edited out, and voice-  
overs take the place of our raw voices. Voices that  
I trust, cherish, but these voices are too crude that  
around us cast nets, so that we become crabs in and  
out of ourselves, so that I remark to you (you're on  
top now) that things that need to be asked can only  
be answered with skin, redness, pinkness, dots, this.

**#1626**

If it builds, she thinks, I'll  
do this, I'll get out. Is it that  
she's so stuck she can't move?  
The baby needs looking after,  
but, she thinks, so does her  
soul, and to the extent that it's  
not being fed, she needs a new  
bed somewhere. But the money  
isn't hers, it just isn't, and she  
walks the dog thinking these  
thoughts in loops. And this is  
where I intercepted her, in this  
alley, with the dog, with fallen  
traces of one who falls. That I  
didn't acknowledge her speaks  
to the places I've fallen as well.

## #1627

He says that these have an “aura.”  
To the extent that words on a page  
can, they do. He said these things,  
but then they were up on a site that  
has its own aura, the poems become  
composites. Whatever, I thought this,  
not out loud, these auras only work  
in three dimensions, and I’m already  
in three dimensions, I’m already art  
to begin with. Besides, who cares? I  
quickly made a left onto Broad, the  
radio was turned off and I opened  
the window, it was a cold, breezes  
danced around my face, in words.

## #1628

Mrs. Trellings was in bed with her husband of  
fifty summers. Now, it was winter, & the smell  
of his farts, the sound of his snores, all these  
things took her on a soul’s journey to Pluto, in  
a deep freeze of no sleep she would linger. It’s  
a story (Mrs. Trellings thought) of reverse things:  
reverse providence, reverse encounter, all things  
that should culminate ending in anti-climax. But  
it should be noted that Mrs. Trellings was quite  
intelligent, it was a week before Christmas & she  
saw turkeys everywhere. They had five kids. She  
thought of them, left it at that. And didn’t sleep.

#1629

This party was too much, she was dancing, she moved away from me, she wanted this other guy, they danced, I sat watching guys go into the bathroom to do blow, I looked out at the palms, realized we were all caught in a net of perfect safety, circular perfection, getting what you want when you want it, why is it that from Pascal to Hollywood, perfection kills? Then he felt he was already dead, headed for the bathroom himself, cold & comforted.

#1638

She was eating lunch, I was watching her eat lunch, I started having all these thoughts about how people reveal themselves, even just how they eat their meals but it was such a nice day and I had a few drinks and I just kind of got lost in it all, the food was really good but there was this sense that nothing could really last, everyone has these great cars and these great lives but nothing really lasts, and I start to worry even just about eating lunch like this, isn't there something better I should be doing? Isn't there something more important than this? I don't want to get all existential about this cause it happens all the time, but I'm telling you this cause I know you have these feelings too, and it doesn't matter how we communicate as long as the basic gist of things comes through, in fact I'm kind of eating lunch right now and kind of having the same feelings, I get depressed in the afternoons here because everything is so still and perfect, so even though I have to live in this perfected state (some people say it's exalted, I don't think it's exalted, I don't even know what exalted means) it just doesn't work. I guess the lesson is that we should all skip lunch, I know it's completely absurd but it might be better just to eat breakfast and dinner, but you know, people in this town have to do certain things at certain times which is why I treasure this, but hold on a sec I just got a text from somebody, do you mind if I call you back, if not today tomorrow, I really want to hear your thoughts on this?

#1639

Look, it's not like I could've raised you any other way. The rules are the rules and you know the way this town is, I don't want to see you there sitting there sulking like you don't enjoy these things. My deal is over, I'm an old bitch whose worn out my welcome on every conceivable avenue, my tits sag, my breath stinks, the guys I have left can't get it up half the time. You have to use it, kiddo, you have to use what you've got, and if I push, it's just because the reputation you make now is going to follow you around forever, and yeah, you don't have to use eyeliner just to cross the fucking street, you don't have to wear fur to buy cigarettes, but I've given you all this shit specifically to use, and I don't necessarily mind (though I'm tempted to barge in and steal some of that cock for myself) hearing your bed-springs creaking at five in the morning cause it means you're doing good business and that's the whole point of living here, you do good business or you don't, and you'll see what it's like when you're doing this, you go straight to hell and have to live through the little cunts like yourself, but you're *my* little cunt and I'm not going to see you waste *your* little cunt while you still have all that juice running between your legs like I use to have, and this needs to become a family tradition because family is all I have left. So just keep going where you need to go, but don't complain to me about love, there is no love, there's only skin, blood, cum, spit, phlegm, & lots of it.

#1642

People need to understand that you *can* make a difference these days. Alright, so the system's trash, we make a new system. Or, if we don't, we change the system. People don't realize that there is a "we" but I've seen it with my own eyes, this really is still (no matter what anyone says) the greatest country in the world and you have to be a part of it and you have to try and change things. It's not like I condone all my own methods, but I'm a woman and you have to use what you have, and when you see these guys with their pants down (and I've seen all kinds of guys with their pants down), you really get a sense of the humanity of America and Americans and how all the threads really do tie everything together and my methods work for me, there is no judgment though some may insist on judging. You have to understand what the important judgment really is: are you an American or are you not? Do you care or do you not? Not everything I do can be as perfect as I want it to be but the important thing is, I'm building, I'm going somewhere with this. There's a place for me somewhere in this administration and I just have to find it, and I'm a determined American woman with a big heart and it's not like others don't do the things I do. There are times when I'm in the middle of these things and all I can do is visualize the American flag because it still means something, that red, white, and blue is woven into my entire body and my whole brain and everything else. The times where anyone can say *screw it* are over and done with, and it's time for the real Americans to stand up and do what needs to be done so that the red, white, and blue don't fade into the kind of blackness I see all around me in Washington. To think, I could've wasted my life.

## #1645

The father's gaze (depending which gaze you happen to be referring to) is panoptic. It goes in without leaving traces. So if you have several fathers that leave no traces, &

merely invisible gazes, there is or maybe a sense in which you have no fathers. I saw all this happening to me, along with every thing else, many years ago, before I could

visualize the cell I was in, before I knew how the walls stank of fresh paint, or saw that I was getting smeared at any juncture. But, as I saw this, my father who was my

father turned, spoke down to me in such a way that I listened. I took what he said, gazed at my cell, and watched the paint dry deep into the night before I busted out to

watch the dawn break over the Delaware.

## #1646

A ring of retards, she said to herself, a ring of retards. It was her turn to speak, speak she did, but she watched herself the whole time, thinking how dumb the whole thing would look to one of her old friends, in the days when she (and they) ruled the world, because the world was so tiny and they could encompass it. She gets up to piss, and notices nothing. She's still gorgeous and she knows it, that's that. Yes, I saw this happen, I was down there with them. But then, you don't know who I am, do you, and does it matter?

**#1647**

She told me I love boy/girl poems, love scenes in them based on a deep degeneracy inherited from too much heat around my genitals, as manifest in tangents I could only see if I was getting laid. She told me this as I was getting laid in such a way that any notion

of telling was subsumed in an ass as stately as a mansion, which I filled with the liquid cobwebs of my imagination. There was grass outside being smoked in a car in which another boy/girl scenario played out in a brunette giving a fine performance of Bolero in her movements,

and I immediately flashed back to the deep genitals of my first girlfriend and the way she used to implore God's help at certain moments, who was certainly watching this. That's it, that's the whole spiel I have on boy/girl poems and why they are hated by the dry dunces who love them.



#1649

Oh you guys, you guys are tough.  
I came here to write about some  
thing, but now that I came, I can't  
come to a decision about what I

came for. What? You said I can't  
do this? You said it's not possible  
because it's a violation and not a  
moving one? It's true, you guys

are tough. You know I have tried,  
at different times, to please you in  
little ways, but this one time I had  
this student that was giving me head

and she stopped in the middle to tell  
me that I had good taste and you had  
bad taste, and I'll admit it, I believed  
her. She was your student too, maybe

you've seen her around. She's the one  
with the scarves and the jewelry and  
the jewels and the courtesy to give the  
teachers head who deserve it. Do you?

## #1651

What's this about making moves, said  
the apprentice? I've got irons in the fire  
with all these pieces, isn't that enough?  
To have mastered how the fire works,  
so that each piece burns right down: it's  
not the only move that matters, but as  
I just made a line of rooks rather than  
pawns, what else could possibly get my  
goat? The master heard this, appearing

limber, but quite chained to the voices  
that were taking away the tools he used  
to put his apprentices in their places. I  
have nothing to say about this, he said,  
as he wiped beads of sweat from a brow  
that furrowed so intensely that all his  
enemies insisted he had dark ties. Just  
make rows of rooks instead of pawns,  
and you will find yourselves kings and

queens. They all left him that night, after  
dumping the ashes in a river that ran in  
back of the workshop, into a black sea.

## #1654

The traces of this woman, who *is*  
a woman, go all over the world, as  
I don't objectify what I have no  
need to objectify. Can you guess  
who she is? Can you guess why I  
would need to write in code so  
that all the little poets don't place  
me in brine vats? I heard him say  
all this, and let me tell you, it was  
sickening. Haven't we heard how  
bodies in text are obsolescent? This  
is where I jumped in, and I am the  
final eye, that sees all. Black and  
white impulse, red veins. Pleasures.

#506

I have seen  
something  
other than  
what I am

it is open  
as air, it is  
closed to a  
tee, it is a

picture of  
me as me in  
a movie of  
me that's a

vision of me  
as an "I" in  
a picture of  
an old movie

#507

I am is,  
in saying,  
like being

in woods,  
like leaves,  
like trees,

like a place  
to rest after  
you know

what I mean.

**#508**

O life, O time, dark dark dark  
& all that, that bit, where you  
confront all that won't submit,  
it's nobody's favorite bit, it's  
a bloody miracle we ever get  
anything else, yet you never  
hear talk of it except in art, &  
it's gone out of fashion, right  
from Milton's front page into  
the dark dark dark, but it's still  
dark as a mudslide, & as dense

**#509**

There are gusty showers  
    in Philadelphia, showers  
that beat up empty lots,  
  
down in sooty Kensington,  
    you could almost believe  
what the books say about  
  
being-in-the-world, I mean  
    being in a damned world, it  
really does seem that way  
  
on greasy days in Philadelphia.

**#510**

Whaddya know, she said,  
you've coined a phrase we  
can all use, just by keeping  
your mouth shut, just by  
whistling past the dust-bins,  
hat in hand, hand in glove,  
gloved from tyranny by a  
left-handed smoke shifter,  
a bloody miracle, she said

#511

It's all so  
anxious,  
this living,  
panting  
realizations  
of what  
isn't, could  
never be,  
sky doesn't  
care, earth  
doesn't care,  
mud-soaked  
leaves—

#512

as if I would strike you,  
as if I, myself, were pushing  
your face away, fists livid  
against yr soft, wasp-y cheeks.  
in some other world my parts  
bear nectar, my hands clasp  
your own like wanted shelter.  
in some other dream your  
eyes don't freeze but melt,  
sugar cubes smashed by light.

#521

It is in the thing  
that impels hands  
forward, what curls  
into fists, coiled  
laughter, shaded  
disclosures, every  
inflection of every  
emphatic shove of  
feeling into flesh.

It is consciousness  
behind, above, below  
me, only me, as I  
am writing an “it” that  
is me, that crosses  
arms in healing flame-  
lit gestures, that creeps  
down echoes of  
creeping vines, re-  
collected in affinity  
with an “it” that is it,  
being me.

#522

Your arms  
oppress me;  
my deep  
exhaustion  
plagues  
you like  
tax-forms.  
Think of  
waves of  
honey,  
tides of  
butter, all  
melting  
into a dense,  
impregnable  
bind—  
if this is  
the lease,  
I’ll sign.

#524

Dressed to kill,  
I go insane as I  
think of killing  
you in undressing,  
a sense of weird  
lightning bottled  
inside me wells  
up spontaneously,  
I'm tearing at my  
body's corners, I  
can't stop thinking  
of jumps into ether,  
memorandums, just  
love, whatever it  
means, whatever it  
is, whatever it  
wants to be inside  
us, a harlequin, a  
moose, a daffodil,  
a way of explosives  
going off in a row  
& corn being mowed in  
Iowa, Illinois, or "I."

#528

What will the poem,  
a wary protuberance,  
say to admixtures of  
green grassy gardens  
sprung sans respite, &  
hood winked dudes?  
Not to implicate you,  
but someone must  
choose, truly, when  
this linzer tart stands  
eating my plate, in  
spite of all spite with-  
held, beyond all dreams  
you can measure, near  
a fracas which seems  
risible. Not that I care.

#533

Lawyers I know do blow.  
Every line is crass. Books  
line their well-ordered flats  
that look out on views that  
might as well be New York.  
Amped up, 13<sup>th</sup> St. gleams  
like Central Park, Woody's  
like a petting zoo for fruits.  
I watch for lines of truth.  
Tomes, philosophy— queer.  
What would Marx say here?  
That jobless attorneys stave  
off ennui by nose-dripped  
ecstasy, made a commodity?



Oh, she was really cute,  
but she just doesn't get  
it. I mean, she has these  
perfect little blue eyes,  
and our feet were almost  
touching, but she kept  
talking about other girls.  
It didn't help that I had  
to hear her whole stupid  
life story about growing  
up in fucking Reading.  
Now she wants to open  
up a shop with sex toys  
and a café. I mean, that's  
fine, but it was all about  
her, I couldn't get a word  
in edgewise, and now I  
can't go into the bar where  
she works because I sort  
of don't want to see her.  
But I'm still attracted to  
her too. I swear to God,  
all these fucking hick girls  
come to the city and they  
can't handle it. I wanted  
to tell her, listen, sister,  
don't mess around with  
a girl that's been around.  
You're cute but I could  
fuck you over if I wanted  
to. I've got skills that you  
don't. What's the point?  
She'll learn soon enough.

#535

I was fucking this girl  
in the ass, late at night,  
and I looked out into  
the parking lot across  
the street and moon-  
light glistened on the  
cars, I thought, that's  
it, I don't give a shit  
anymore, you can take  
your America, shove  
it up your ass just like  
I'm doing here, that's  
when I came, and it  
was a good long one.

#536

I stood naked, a  
disappeared text,  
dissolved in more  
text that was done  
in French, smudged  
lines, heart-shaped  
erasures, crossings,  
a witch, not such  
a bluebird as she  
was when I listened  
to her in a bar,  
stoned in Rockford,  
letter stored in  
her belly, tugging.

#541

Like the lamp by your bed  
with no shade and the Stein  
books you never read on  
your shelf and the sweat  
that rolls down the crack  
of your ass when we fuck  
(the smell of driven slush),

Like the granules these  
things are or may be, as I  
tell you what it is you like  
about me discussing in bits  
your bits that form a kind  
of trinity hovering above  
the places you place plants,

but it is not nor shall ever be  
like anything else again, as  
there is no simile for the  
marks of incredibly bright  
weakness around your eyes  
as you lounge around in your  
panties, two blues, guess which?

#542

Angie did not  
arrive to white  
me out— alone  
in bed, 3 am, I  
smoked butts,  
blue lights, haze-  
like, spinning, an  
angel's halo— I felt  
dirty, upbraided by  
blueness, as if it  
showed me what  
I was past  
entanglements,  
redness in me  
atrophied— I  
would have been  
better, I thought,  
inside Angie,  
butt-fucking.  
That's what  
was in dreams  
once the haze left.

#545

Words are spirits,  
words wording  
through us like  
savored pulp.  
Words, strained  
or comatose,  
plucking laurel  
for some lucky  
fuck. Substantive  
spirit words, cored &  
pitted, wait to be bit  
like knowledge of  
good & evil, stems.  
Not a cask or a flask—  
some vessel from  
nether regions of  
Venus. Easy to be  
dispirited, cored,  
yet stem systems are  
permanent. Say them.

#547

Spirit melts, leaving  
butter particles strewn  
along leaf-veined avenues—  
how absurd, that it should  
be in poetry, hiding there  
like a cat in a dry bath-tub,  
like water in a drain, like  
so much dark moon.

#549

I'm conscious of freedom, how it  
flares against brick, how it stirs.  
Yellow backs of combatants, &  
chain-gang commerce in armor,  
mind-forged manacles scraped,  
muscle-displays in time's diaspora.  
Lastly, they turn away from facts,  
look instead at trunk-scissions,  
leafy morasses, all over small-  
town America, steeples chased.  
I'm conscious of this, of my own  
yellow writing it down, seated.

#552

Guns are connected to power; you  
want to shoot because you are shot,  
you want to kill because you are killed,  
you like nature because it happens  
to be easy. Your mouth, as you kill,  
is a waft of rodent-dirt, you rats. I  
see myself as a kind of tree behind  
all this, not that I'm solid or stolid,  
just that I can absorb the prickly  
twitch of your whiskered faces.  
I have no problem with ferreting  
out small animals. What if it turns  
out they want to be elected; hope?

#553

I'd love to  
enter you  
this way—  
go, stop,  
go; go, stop,  
go; until

I could fill  
your canvas  
w/ presence;  
I'd love to  
turn you  
onto yourself;

you, who,  
yourself, are,  
spatially,  
two-in-mouth,  
knees-at-hip,  
entered.

#555

Wood-floored bar on Rue St. Catharine—  
you danced, I sat, soused as Herod,  
sipped vodka tonic, endless bland  
medley belting out of the jukebox—  
you smiling, I occupied keeping you happy,  
un-frazzled— suddenly sounds behind us,  
the bar wasn't crowded & a patron  
(rakish, whisker-flecked big mouth)  
lifted a forefinger at beer-bellied  
bartender bitching back, soon a real  
fight, violence in quiet midnight,  
I, scared, got you out of there

but you had to dance, you said,  
had to dance so we paved Plateau, tense steps,  
found nothing, you started crying & stamping  
your feet like a child, I grabbed you & dragged  
you back to our room you stripped, curled  
into fetal position, beat your fists against  
the mattress, in this way you danced  
through the night, dozed & woke ready for more—

#564

in your “not-I”  
saying is sex  
phonemes go  
fricatives fill  
in space for “I”  
it’s all I said  
(was I saying  
anything red  
for yr blood in  
you at all for  
being me?)

#565

Battle for deliverance,  
struggle for salvation,  
Christ’s passion condensed  
into ten fluid seconds,  
sections of flesh leaving,  
sense of “Geist” overhead.  
Yet you’ve shrunk before  
Romance into “post-  
everything entropy,” so  
even the love of one’s  
life becomes another show,  
rigged like a government’s  
actions, glommed onto  
deadly ennui. Christ.



#567

Oh, to be half in love in New York—  
moments of almost caress in Union Square,  
almost embrace in Alphabet City,  
almost consummation on Brooklyn F Train—  
remembering confessions at Fez,  
Lafayette Place, eruptions of late-night  
mania on Broadway, lusts at  
Ludlow Street's Living Room,  
I wonder what half of us could've  
fallen— now, I'm half at ease  
w/ memories of half a love,  
half lived in livid, lurid Times  
Square, also smog-red Hudson  
sunsets spent on half-lit banks,  
hand-in-hand, hoping for an omen  
from doldrums of a half-dead city—

#571

Of course, there had to be  
a pretty nurse— this one was  
pale blonde, thin, always in  
jeans, fat iron cross affixed  
to breast-heavy chest. I  
couldn't ignore eye-teeth  
that made her look like a  
vampire. In my pill-popped  
dementia, I saw her kneel  
beside my bed, swill blood  
from my neck, nourish  
herself on my sickness.  
In swoons, a Christian  
vampire seems no weirder  
than enforced Twister,  
watched Monopoly, or  
face-painting forty-year-olds:  
she fit right in. That's the bin.

#572

On the bus to fifth  
grade, eleven years  
old, I couldn't breathe,  
they had to call an  
ambulance, put me  
on oxygen. My father  
arrived, shaking and  
crying; "First my mother,  
now my son." I loved  
him so much, it didn't  
seem strange that, upon  
leaving the hospital,  
he returned me to school  
in time for math class.

#562

I see you foraging through  
weeds in a field; it's spring,  
air streaked green. I'm with  
you in the field: I'm mud, or  
grass, I'm beneath your nails,  
held fast. Bark flakes off me.  
You pass on, satisfied. Branches  
sway, flecked by tongues—  
look at my garden's sprawl;  
do you see me here, or in the air?

#577

You can only transcribe by dying,  
the things you transcribe are dying,

the way you transcribe is dying  
by the time you transcribe,

so if you must transcribe,  
you must die, or die trying

#2042

If you attempt to  
create something  
solid from language,  
all the million  
harrows of your  
inadequacy must  
pursue you, what's  
solid is harrowing—

past your control.  
As for I, you had  
better sacrifice the  
whole construct,  
complexities & all,  
as it is all evanescent,

and circuits back to  
language show you  
all the magic  
prophecies of non-  
existence you not  
only fulfill, but harrow—

**#2090**

I'm, I wanted to tell her,  
that last bit of Russia you  
just can't conquer— so,  
as you retreat for the last  
time, with knowledge that  
the war is turning in my  
favor, I sigh that humanity  
has to be what it is— a little  
extra strychnine in my morning  
coffee, to settle me down—

**#1300**

On the trip I had one mind,  
everyone else had twelve or  
more, I maintained weight,  
sat around doing nothing as I  
wandered a baffling universe  
of locked-in zeroes spinning  
all around the two talismans  
that gave the apartment its  
currents, Jimmy the Face,  
Martha the Mask, and they  
slayed all my enemies, countless  
piles of shit, while fame gave  
me bark to shave off and I  
complained of mirrored graves—

#1913

You watch, as in slow motion glass-hewn objects crash to the ground, as streams back and forth confirm, once again, you've cracked into a slug-pile of heartless psychopaths—I stand aside, jaundiced, wearing my own glasses, knowing blown glass to be how human interstices are knit, words to be an absolute sky of glass, and here I am, speaking to you in transparencies—

#1176

Your guts tell you when something's wrong— here I am at war in darkness— no moss over me, no camouflage— I lean forward— but oh the degenerate trenches, so very boring, passion kept to a minimum, fires aglow never, and my guts fear the soulless twerps, jealous that I might be brought low by some version of cripple's wisdom— Conshohocken—

#154

I'm not blind or slimy, she told  
him, you're just an asshole with  
unrealistic expectations. Summer  
outside: black and white buildings,  
covered in sweat. The picture evens  
out (roughly) to brown. She swoons  
at the idea of touching. I'm done  
with her, he tells himself, strained  
to keep his hands off el primo real  
estate. But the parents-built picket  
fence is stuck up his ass. Someday  
he'll jounce it out, impale her on it—  
right through the heart. I wonder, she  
chimes blithely, if you can define slime?

#2104

If I don't have a lot of nerve,  
somebody does— trying, in  
unspeakably unspeakable times,  
to speak the unspeakable—

rain falls on Fayette Street at  
dawn, I'm having half a nervous  
breakdown, on an acid trip,  
pinning branches to the sky—

EQUATIONS: BLUE & YELLOW DOG PRESS, 2011

# I. Thesis



## #1

Here's my equation: sex is more human than everything else. Let me put sex to the left of me and you to the right of me. In the interstices between me and sex, I have achieved my greatest consonance with humanity. In the interstices between me and you, I can (hopefully) give you a greater consonance with humanity, just by showing you the seams, the zippers, the ruffles, the cuffs, all the accoutrements that dress us up to be naked, in a text with its own nakedness. If I start with Marie, it is to show you her humanity so that you know why this was, for both of us, a fortunate fall. Marie had pale flesh. I am watching her; she is sitting on the little grass upwards-going slope behind the White Lodge, sipping a bottle of beer. Her straight, shoulder length black hair is parted in the middle. Then, a big open field with a peninsula of woods behind it; we're in the woods, making out. She wants to lie down amid the ferns, twigs, dirt, grass, and have it off. She's a teenager and I'm 22 and I'm freaked out, can't do it. So that I learn two kinds of hungriness can't always converge. Our bodies are slaves to different masters: duty, propriety to the right of us, impetuosity, passions to the left. When two hungers meet, they must negotiate. My hands go up her sleeveless, multi-colored blouse, but I'm going down the slope towards duty and right action.

## #2

When hungers meet in the middle, who wins? I held onto the top of my black mattress for leverage, Marie beneath me. Black mattress feels like a black Sabbath with this teenage princess on it, who has brought us hydrochloride pot to smoke. It's a cloudy afternoon in late November. To the right of us is the empty red fuzz coat with black buttons Marie likes to wear. To the left of us is the sense that you can't get what you want without breaking rules. I am consonant with the knowledge that morality is an ill-fitting glove for most mortals. The rightness of this is the rightness of me going down for the first time, thus expunging everything in my system that does not want to serve Marie. Intoxication traces its way around us and if I have fallen (and I know that I have) it is because what the preachers will tell you leaves too much out. As there is no bed (just the black mattress) no one in the house hears the pounding. She offers to take my streams, but I must not. It is in her nature to want the promise of motherhood hidden in the folds of her body. So our deepest hunger remains unsatisfied. Marie is naked except for the series of necklaces she likes to wear, and as she sits astride me they make little jingling noises that tell a tale of bitter bliss.

### #3

Time and sex: sex chronology is not linear. Sex and time are both conversant with strange leaps. It is the first day of the first class I will ever teach. Julie looks at me with big round black eyes, soulfully. She has long wavy black hair and her looks are dark, foreboding. We often want what wants us; Julie makes a habit of following me, from the classroom to the subway, from the subway to the Last Drop. As a student, she's haphazard. What she teaches me is that when someone follows you, they can make you follow them; on the walk home from the Drop, I realize my mind is following her, into her apartment, onto her bed, underneath the sheets, underneath her folds, into her little stomach. But I can't. So I let her follow me, knowing that this will lead (eventually) to a culminating moment. My hunger is for continuance. Julie wants the thrill of picking up a hot potato and dropping it back into the pot. But these early weeks are all titillation, so that every soulful look to me is the countenance of continuance, has endurance written into it. Is this my wife? Marriages have been initiated in stranger fashions. Julie is as pale as Marie, but much flintier, so I know strife will be a feature of my daily existence, after we are married. I think this as I stand before the class, discoursing on Chaucer, gazing at this little wife of Bath.

#### #4

The semester is over, almost. I am making a pact with Satan to get away with this. It is all fine and feisty as I bite the bullet, walk the knife edge, get in touch with my renegade parts. But I never lose sight of the hunger for permanence, which is by no means Julie's. Her hunger is just to have what cannot be had, so that she can be a special person. Two hungers collide into nakedness, and neither seems to care that they don't coalesce. We are separate via our separate hungers, and human in our desperate need to pursue them, singularly, and only marginally together. Her apartment is a mess, but with high ceilings, who cares? So we climb into our bed of separate hungers and square off. I learn nothing because I do not see what her hunger is. I think she's just like me. Of course, she wants what I want. Of course, she thinks, he wants what I want, to do something to make himself a special person. What neither knows is that we're both not special, we are both (and more than we realize), lusterless in our separate lusts. There is no innocence lost because raw hungers remain innocent until proven otherwise. You can pound away a hunger, but each thrust by no means puts you deeper into the other person. You move deeper into privations of private passions, unexpressed. But Julie looks so young and callow that I don't notice these things. This, I think, is the beginning; but Julie has already become a special person, and wants a way out. We both sleep topless in the May heat.

## #5

Something holds Julie back so that there can't be too much of this. While I am with her, she controls everything, from my sensations to my destiny. She can bite me off, permanently cripple me, or please me if she wants. As master, she decides how much hunger she will or will not assuage. She uses her hands as well as her mouth, doing little twists like she's learned to do from Internet porn. It's delicious, my legs shake from the unbearable nature of the sensations. The problem is, she then freezes, which means she is deliberately effacing my most overwhelming pulses. So I come in her frozen, static mouth, with a sense of intense anti-climax, and I am too bashful to instruct her as to how to do this properly. Yet any woman who brings me to this must be a darling and an angel. Julie, this darling angel, stands on the threshold of womanhood, and her hunger is merely to control. There is no sense of service, and since we are in my apartment there is no sense of comfort for her. What she wants to take home with her is a sense of having bested me. As she gazes at my closed eyes and opened mouth, there is (I imagine now) a sense of bitterly held contempt for my weakness, my humanity. We never fuse our different stupidities, so that I see no depths in those rounded eyes of jet, and she knows that she has now gotten what she wants from me; there is no more specialness.

## #6

Then, there are those happy, halcyon times (and such times do exist) in which all the parts fit, the striations interlock in such a way that no one gets ploughed over, no one bested, no hungers perpetuated. Little Mindy works retail with me. There is something doll-like about her, but she has Puerto Rican roots and olive skin, black hair either frizzed or smoothed down on top of her head. We establish a bond that has both elements of tightness and looseness. So when she starts dropping by my apartment, it is with foreknowledge in her hunger (which I do not quite realize) that sex is very much on the menu. Of course, as all fine young ladies do, she holds most of the cards. But as we sit on my blue, rather ratty old couch, smoking not-very-potent weed and listening to the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, I jolt towards her, realizing that her energy is sucking me in. She is so small and delicate that I feel transgressive just touching her, but, more importantly, our hungers meet in the middle, so that nothing is withheld, everything coalesces: we are a successful narrative.

## #7

Mindy, like Marie, wants my streams. The difference is that this has nothing to do with eventual parturition. Mindy loves thrill seeking and joyrides; she wants to experience things fully; she has the temperament of an artist. So that our sex is never quite perfect; I pull out, thinking prudent thoughts. Mindy is left serviced but undernourished. There are strange gaps in her mind; it doesn't occur to Mindy what the disasters of unwanted pregnancies amount to. I know (I am thirty, she is nineteen) that a stream from me will undo our successful narrative. The narrative maintains an edge of longing based on calculations I do that she will not. And the spaces between our major encounters are filled with text messages, because cell phones are now part of everyone's relationship equations. Cell phones are a flush; they break up narratives into crumbs. Fortunately, both Mindy and I know how to employ cell phones and text messages in successful ways. They are a sauce on an entrée. But as successful as our narrative is, Mindy is left hankering after an innocence that I don't have. She wants the wild looseness I have left behind to make my way in the world. I have high art consonance and a stern disposition; my publishing life is serious and on the up and up; the bar crawls, bashes, and orgies of my past have been left behind. Our time together is, must be, short: I hunger too much for things she doesn't understand yet, she hungers for behaviors I've abandoned.

## #8

Sex and destiny— Jean is on top of me. She has straight, shoulder-length blonde hair parted on one side; her small, dainty mouth pouts. She is doing some kind of clench with her moves; she wants my streams. She wants them randomly, because she wants to be a mother; it's a role to play. Everyone, I learn, wants a role to play. Because the material circumstances are not promising, because I have prudent thoughts, I pull out and away from her. It is the spring of my twenty-fourth year; she's nineteen. Nevertheless, I have experienced something ethereal; other worlds, other universes, spirit traces all around us. There is an unbelievable pleasure and release in actually conceiving a child. Then, there is Jean's wildness, her drunkenness, the faux leopard skin coat she wears, cowboy boots, cigarettes, marijuana. She's a graphic arts student; she has a shared studio in Powelton Village, with high ceilings; we make love tenderly on a large black divan. I am into all this because she picked me up one night at Philly Java, in the midst of a brutal snowfall. We retreated back to my apartment; I wanted to learn about wild things, wild nights. Jean is a mentor to me and is already a veteran about many things I know little of.



## #9

Anyone who is a mentor is also a friend. Jean is sharing her knowledge with me out of pure friendliness. She is bemused by my naïve limitations. She shows me how to do doggy-style; how to sixty-nine; how different kinds of “kink” can liven things up. When she decides to ride me in nothing but cowboy boots, I notice that there are ways to make sex memorable if you have a flair for drama. She insists that we have sex when she is menstruating, and asks me to save the condom as a memento. But in all this friendliness, there are serious undercurrents. I’m not going to be the father of her child; she has other affairs going at the same time; she is fitting me in. Jean is a drifter with a vagabond’s restlessness; one day, I leave her at a subway station on Market Street, and am left with a sharp intuitive sense that I may never see her again. One of her equations is, if I can move quickly enough, I can never be bound. Sure enough, she’s gone from my life. I have gained in wisdom and experience; she, perhaps, has gained nothing. But when I look at the memories she’s left me with, I am struck that they are mostly happy. Vagabond equations leave no room for angst; there is no sense of things withheld. They give you everything they are, and you may keep what you wish.

## #10

Heather is easily misinterpreted. She goes to bed with me for complex reasons: because she has pity for this underling artist, who tries so hard to be recognized; because this underling artist gives her treats (a public forum for her own underling art); because she finds him hard to resist after a few drinks; and because, lo and behold, she is genuinely aroused by what happens when these things are investigated. I don't have many interpretations of Heather; she's average height, average weight, a face more handsome than beguilingly pretty (sort of a WASP Frida Kahlo, heavy eyebrows, thick lips, dark hair that rides her head in waves). But what happens in bed is so climactic that it takes us beyond our self-serving interpretations. This is a woman who *gives*; every inch of her is covered in desire, which can (and must) be fulfilled. Heather likes sex more than any other woman I've slept with. She screams, bites, moans, and there is such a delicious fluidity to her movements that, despite her near-homeliness, I am moved to do the same thing. Heather is teaching me how rare it is to find a partner who loves these processes, who makes sex a manifestation of spiritual generosity. We're both almost thirty; I've never seen someone who contains both the generosity and the sense of comfort Heather has in the physical act.

## #11

In this favorite game, and when youth is involved, women often hold the cards. Heather has decided that we will have two nights, no more. There is something in me that wants and needs her too much. She is too touched, too moved. It's safer just to flush the thing. I don't particularly realize this, as we sit at the Cherry Street Tavern. All I know is an anxious feeling that I'm going on a trip and Heather is giving me a warm goodbye. It is a trip involving my art and my sense is that I'm going to get killed. Heather, she knows privately, is about to kill me too. She puts in her diaphragm and when I come, it is an exquisite lunge into some variant of heaven. Her intake of breath tells me that she is getting my stream. She might even be frightened that the diaphragm is punctured. Amidst all the peace and its benignity is the sense that things are getting out of hand. This is unsanctioned intercourse, out of mutual dependence; Heather feels this too much. So that, when I get back from my ten days in New England (where I have, in fact, been killed), Heather is nowhere to be found. That part of her that took my streams is loathe to take any more, too happy, too at peace. I learn that Heather represents that great portion of humanity that wants to be in pain. Ecstasy is a dead end street; it is too unreliable, too jumpy. Heather now goes for guys that give her the manner and form of the pain she wants, and not too much of the nice stuff.

## #12

Indeed, some equations are about nothing but pain: consummate, unceasing, unyielding pain. With Heather, the extreme fluidity of our intercourse lubricated into being a mixed set of thoughts and emotions. Ecstasy and agony remained in exact, if delicate, balance. From the moment I met Roberta, while still a young boy, her presence engendered in me a sense of extreme attraction and craving, soured by a sense of her as obstinate, obdurate, and generally a hard case. Roberta as a girl had olive skin, not unlike N; lank tawny hair which fell over her eyes and which she used to preen; a sleek, straightforwardly pretty face, which emphasized prominent cheekbones and (slightly) buck teeth. The story of the emergence of her clique in my class, as of fifth grade at Elkins Park Middle School, and my brief immersion in it, is not worth telling. The story of a dynamic tinged towards Pip-Estella, her used by forces above her to torment me, is worth telling. I was in the clique briefly, then out. What caused both of us the most pain, is a simple reality which animated everything which happened between Roberta and I: she wanted me as much as I wanted her, and we both knew it. We were condemned to be in love at the most star-crossed possible angle, and for many years, until the end of high school. Me in the clique, then half-in, then not in at all didn't matter: a force behind her, built into Cheltenham, the school district and the community, compelled her to play Estella for as long as she knew me. Roberta coped by halving things: she was only sort-of Estella, sort of a would-be lover, sort of with Cheltenham, sort of against. Her own equation was to take whatever emotional response she had to me and tramp it into the ground, just to survive, just to eat. We were playing tennis once, and she broke from her protocol (and disrupted the game) just to tell me a parable of sorts. There was this guy she was mad about, but she knew it just couldn't work out. And she'd done everything she could to try and jockey for a different position in her community, and failed. I was still a child, with a child's level of awareness, but even then I knew she sounded suspiciously like she was talking about me. Cheltenham had thrown her a bone: she had one chance to communicate to me, however obliquely, how she felt in my direction. The parable half-worked. I was never really able to achieve certainty, for myself, however, that it was about me. And for seven years, the half-assed romance stumbled forward. Communities destroyed individuals, as usual. Senior year, the sadness of her half-assed inscription in my yearbook leaned on N, who was more fulsome, for redemption; and both leaned me forward, into my days, to reach the apogee I achieved with Trish.

### #13

Here I am in New England, getting killed. It's summer, there's weed around, booze. I'm perched on a ledge, feel I'm being pushed off. Look who's here to visit: Wendy, two years older than me, who has two pieces coming out in *Poetry*. My first major piece has been out two months. We immediately become big shots to each other. Wendy has slightly bronzed skin, brownish hair lightened towards dirty blonde, a voluptuous body but a way of holding herself that suggests she finds her own body embarrassing, somehow unworkable. Yet even her diffidence is enticing; it makes guys want to ram through those defenses. Our equation sinks into place: I'm a young Poundian firebrand, she's got all the spiritualized quiriness of Emily Dickinson, but with sex appeal. We are standing, having drinks in my room, smoking cigarettes in the balminess (open windows, flies). There's a party down the hall we abandoned to smoke in peace. Somehow, a wind current comes into the room and does a loop so that the door closes: a minor miracle, or a universe sign concerning what's meant to happen next. It does: I reach over, begin with gropes, which soon turn into kisses. As we go into this, Wendy lets her hair loose from her pony tail. We are two geniuses, kings and queens, and this is within days of Heather, her positing of me as underling. Such is a life in the arts. When a surfeit of symbolic material lands on two souls, they (sometimes) have no choice but to act them out. As I enter her, Wendy becomes a symbol of my own artistic potency, and I of hers.

## #14

As I pound away at Wendy, I notice this about her: she's scared of sex. I am on top of her, she clutches my arms with her hands. It's like she thinks I might go crazy if not held back. Her eyes are opened wide and looking into mine, glazed and petrified. I later find out that fear of sex is one of her great poetic themes. But we bang away on this tiny narrow bed with no sheets in this dorm room that must suffice for this ten-day residency. I try Jean's tricks (variations) but nothing works; Wendy's afraid. She's denied the unction of a stream; I'm wearing a condom. This goes on all night, right through the New England summer 4 am sunrise. There is some gruesomeness to wolf-hour sunlight that only New Englanders know. She leaves me and there is poignancy to her leaving because we both know this cannot happen again; we have taken our roles too far. She can't handle the moves that accrue to the life of a big genius and I don't like this diffidence in her parts that hates sex, loathes feelings, wants to curl up underneath a crab shell and close its eyes forever. I'm twenty-nine, and I'm building relationships that are instantly obsolescent. Wendy, for one night, got to be a goddess, and me to be a god, only to find out that we're just more normal people doing that hallowed, time-honored routine: fake it 'til you make it.

## #15

With Heather, Wendy, Julie, and the others: mostly hokey contrivance. All roads must lead back to Jena, because she is where the road begins. Picture a nineteen-year-old woman in the first bloom of rich youth. Not material wealth as in money, but in looks and everything else. Jena stands about 5'6, she has cornstalk blonde hair, cut short into a pageboy. Her large, bright blue eyes tend to widen when she is pleased or aroused, and her smile is wide enough to split her face in half. Thick lips, a roundish face, high forehead, skin just pale enough to make her whole contours have a quality of shock about them; large breasts that do not even have the thought of sag in them; flat stomach; long legs that she deliberately displays in such a way that the adjective "coltish" seems appropriate. Jena was born and bred in a small town; it would be inconceivable that she would have sex for any reason but love. We work up to sex over a period of two months. Because we are working in tune with our emotions, because we let ourselves fall in love first (at twenty, I have been in love before, but never like this), when we get down to the business of physical passion we do it with no holds barred, so that nothing, no roles, no equations, no rigid striations, needs to be contrived. At twenty, I don't quite realize the miraculous nature of what I'm getting; I have no idea how far, how fast, and how bitterly I will have to fall after Jena. I just naively swim into her, her into me, and every squish that happens between our bodies strikes a chord felt by us both.

## #16

Jena lives, this year, on the fourth floor of Runkle Hall. I am on her bed; she is sitting astride me, still fully clothed. She fishes me out of my pants. She uses her hands, in such a way I can sense she's done this before. But it doesn't matter, because my mind swims, swirls, does dances. It goes off into space. There is a cosmic dimension to sex that (I will learn later) only manifests with someone you love. So, this is a hand job, but as I come my entire consciousness heaves; whatever is rigid or rigidly held in my brain turns to mush. If there is any ice left, she has taken a pick-ax to it. And, unlike later lovers, she doesn't stop the process when I start to shoot. Her hands move in a steady rhythm for the entire duration of my orgasm. This is, for me, unspeakable, and so generous I'm not ready to appreciate it. As the world falls back into place, as I reenter this static universe, I realize that sex really can lift a human soul upwards. It's just that I have yet to learn the ways it can get stale, so I believe it must always be like this. Jena diligently creates a wad of tissues to clean us off, even as afternoon sun creates curlicues on the two beds (her roommate not home), the ugly painted brick walls (dull tan), the wooden closets that extend up to the ceiling with silver-rail handles, and all Jena's dainty little possessions: a lava lamp, posters (The Who's *Tommy* on Broadway), pictures of her family. Everything lives, for these moments, in a heightened universe (and universal) perspective. Not God, but something Godly.



## #17

The ecstasy levels built into my time with Kathy were dead-ended, also, by being too unreliable, too jumpy. It's just that at first Kathy & I didn't notice. I was let loose of the bondage with and to Cheltenham High School; Kathy had been more or less happy at North Penn. Yet, here we were in State College, ready to do what was incumbent upon us to do. Kathy, a stout blonde who alternated between jubilation and self-abnegating catatonia, had met me on the North Halls basketball courts one night while a party rocked the place. We improvised a routine and a place: down into the piano room in the Runkle basement. We took each other's virginity eagerly, avidly, without really noticing, and the meat of the matter was just adventure, passing the time, more adventure. I dealt with Kathy's self-abusive moods by playing therapist, to the extent that I could, and the semester swung around us. My roommate gone, we pushed the two beds in my dorm room together to continue our investigations. The sex itself was clumsy, yet strangely clean of transgression; like a couple of kids using a see-saw or on a calliope. There was a place we couldn't go about depth and a bridge we couldn't cross into the richer straits of passion. She bit my neck and left a purple bruise. The girls in my classes laughed at me, but I was a taken in young man. It's just that Kathy was somewhere else. Her real life remained in Lansdale, and she knew it. And with her camera, which she used with great acumen. I was at least noteworthy, other than for having taken her virginity (and she mine), for being a good photo subject, with my wild hair, baby face, and ragamuffin habits. We were preoccupied away from each other, and the feeling I later had with Jena, that *presence*, was missing. All of which was present in us as we distractedly banged away at each other.

## #18

There is the Godly and the diabolical. Someone has stolen Trish away from me; I'm using the Devil's wizardry to get her back. She comes to my apartment, drunk, in a white frilly skirt, hair in a bun, eyes half closed. When the inevitable laying on of hands takes place, Trish mouths a few negatives. Our bodies know that her mouth is being ironic. Faith is something (or someone) you have above the Earth; hands are for taking up out of the Earth to put something else back in again. I am overpowering Trish because we secretly know she is overpowering me. I am part of her equation: let's have sex about art. Since sex about art is meant to turn back into art again, drama, betrayals, secrets, and passionate consummations are all not only valid but mandatory. Her skirt is off, panties down, and for once I don't care how fast this is. I'm in with such ungodly relief that it takes ninety seconds for me to release myself into her. When it's this fast and this good, who cares what the equations are? The only equation is dissolution, and it's as permanent as hokey contrivance, where the human race is concerned. If the diabolical results in as complete a clench of dissolution as Godliness, then who's to say if God and the Devil might not be the same thing? The Devil's universe is as heightened as God's is; the Devil *goes up* just like God does. And, when it ends, you're left with recognitions that all binary systems dissolve in the sexual act, when it is performed without inhibition, and with full knowledge of no consequence.

## #19

The problem is that the Devil is in Trish. What he teaches her is that by withholding herself, she makes herself more enticing. So Trish gives and retreats, gives and retreats. She retreats into other guys, other situations, other modes of being. Her fortress can only be taken by force. As she stands before me, blonde hair going part of the way down her back, her long, thin, snaky body is proud of its sovereignty over my existence. There are lights in her blue eyes that have blackness in them, a way she tosses her head to express pure disdain. It takes me eight months of sweat to really *have* her, and once she is had I sweat to *keep* her. The only vengeance I can take for the trials she has put me through is by the force of my thrusts when we make love; she always leads me to a tremendously hell/heaven climax. And this is sex about art; she's the prize, Muse, vixen. She lives in a house in West Philly with a bunch of other artists. When I write her my odes, it is to whip her into shape. The diabolical strain remains within us, because Trish loves to set up moods of transgression. She does little snake-dances to excite me, snake-twists to heighten our pleasure, and drugs and booze subsist that make the entanglement hinge on escapism. That is one of Trish's major equations: let's escape together. Let's pretend nothing exists but us and our devilish pleasure. Let's play a game in which I tease you into mauling me to death, and you come with such force that you almost go around the pill. Let's tempt fate. It always works because her long, thin body is a stark hunger and a mad craving for me.

## #20

But what the Devil does falls down around the heels when withholding is the only option. Ginny teaches me this, despite the great difference in our ages (my thirty-three to her twenty-two). When we try to escape, it's to a place of no consummations; when we go up, it's like a tarantula's leg that points back down again. Ginny must withhold because she belongs, in every sense, to her family. The luscious red hair, bulging green eyes, extreme voluptuousness of her appearance belie her *raison d'être*: to bind and fasten. As she binds and fastens, there's more looseness than she realizes: you have to give in *sometimes* to get the goods. The truth emerges, after several months of "almost there": Ginny is a virgin. Ginny withholds because her parts have defects. Because she is sickly, her gorgeousness is one of the universe's cruel jokes. The joke is on her and her would-be lovers, and, like most of the best jokes, it isn't that funny. Ginny is one of those strange girls that seems to have no interests in life; that thinks that her body is her only mind; and that her body that is her mind must be so much an issue of blood that to blood it must return. To be a tart is simply recreation; but there is no sense of seriousness or duty behind it. Yet Ginny stands on the mountain of her own pulchritude, and surveys the carnage at the bottom with calculated niceness. She has never known submissiveness, even as part of a strategic plan, and never will; so she perpetually awakens to see she's done no real damage. Her mountain is a reverse mountain, which runs from the soil into hell. At a key moment, in the middle of a summer at the end of the Aughts, with Trish unhappily in Manhattan, Tobi fading, the Free School a memory, Ginny and her friends take the Drop hostage. I earn the right and privilege to be in Ginny's apartment (on Pine Street, down the street east from the Drop) several times, which resembles Julie's, high ceilings, wooden floors. Ginny sits next to me on her sofa and watches children's movies on her laptop. I try nothing. She wields an axe, and her physiology is resolutely shut-down, compacted. The Drop waves the white flag, and, as I knew even then, an era was ending. Everything about her group signaled that we'd all been having too much fun, and that the Center City-wide party was over. Actual sex was *pas*, beside the point. Besides, it was noticeable that when I walked around Center City that summer with Ginny, which I did, everyone looked at us as though we were a couple. Only I knew what was being withheld. The image crafted made me look studly. To her, that was more than enough. Funny: she wouldn't do bars. She just did her translation of bar-life into coffee shops, Temple classrooms, occasional drama productions. She was, herself, her own production—when she wore low-cut tops, or dresses, she was showing everyone who she was, and her breasts were a bared switchblade. That equation: sex used as an over or undertone to or for violence, or just the threat of violence: was big for her. Her tits were a weapon which could extort from the world what she wanted. All our idealism was replaced with back to the grind cynicism. Ginny's favorite dress for special occasions was black, and bared the fangs of her cleavage the right way.

## #21

Have I ever stood wholly on my own reverse mountain? I met Cindy at the Bean on South Street. She was Cuban, with long, stringy black hair, large, frightened blue eyes, and a full figure. Moreover, she exuded a mood of emotional desperation. She was a scared kid and I (age twenty-nine) was on the prowl. The equation was mutual neediness, for separate reasons— she needed me to allay her hunger for affirmation, her need to be needed; I needed her to provide food for a voracious hunger for female flesh. And when I saw her apartment (almost a loft, pictures she had taken strewn everywhere), it added to the novelty aspect of the experience. I penetrated her sans protection, knowing how her neediness could be manipulated; and a torn condom wrapper by the side of the bed painted a picture that could not be mistaken. This girl was lonely. I was in this for the high (no other reason), and while she slept I rode the high out into the universe. I learned that the universe is not only *higher up* but *deeper in*. Because I was only higher up, I felt my high fade into a depression. Cindy clung to me, but the man I was for her that night was a nothingness. Everything I'd done had hurt her, as I later found out. When notches start accruing to your bedpost, it is hard to avoid the crassly materialistic attitude that another notch equals victory. The cost is a series of flights into nothingness, the sensation of a nitrous high gone bad.

## #22

But there are times (not too many) when godliness arrives with a certain cleanliness. They usually aren't next to each other. When I make love to Jena, our bodies actually exude love; there are times when I feel so raw that I seem to have been dropped in an ocean of hunger. But it is hunger only for Jena and no one else, and when we wade into the ocean together it is to breathe. Glamorous circumstances are unnecessary, it is still dorm rooms, mine and hers, but we bring in so much ocean that glamour happens the second we touch. The godliness is in the cleanliness of our equations— she simply wants me and vice versa. I release my streams into her, noting how strange it feels to do this inside someone. Innocence is a miracle that neither of us yet appreciate. What's most innocent is the fact that we both like doing this— others would later teach me that many enjoy the drama and the intensity of situations *around* sex but not the act itself. Jena, in her unselfconsciousness, lets her body go and floats downward into the interstices of consciousness. She does by instinct what men do by force. I watch her face with a kind of wonder— its subtle shifts, slight changes, abrupt mouth movements. We become objects of envy; people want to take what we have. But I'm lost in Jena and the season and its illusions of permanence. What godliness is, is whatever is good, and stays. These memories remain; yet humanity is born of humility (I have sinned, I dwell in imperfection). If, now, the only way out is words, so be it.

## #23

Lisa is convenient for me and vice versa: we work together and, contrary to popular belief, sometimes it helps to eat where you shit. Lisa has big moon eyes, shoulder-length black hair, skinny, medium height. There is no specific mark to raise her looks above the ordinary. Our life together is founded on the maintenance of routines, rituals. We always smoke *this* much pot, have *this* many drinks, listen to *this many* albums per night. Where sex is concerned, we please each other, simply and without fuss. There is no universe but the visible one; nothing goes down or up. But how much of this is nothingness? I'm not pushing deeper into anything; she's a solid mass, someone substantial that doesn't have to take me anyplace. Through a year and a half, this is the way it is. Then, I hear a siren call in the distance. It has spirit traces in it, a sense of romance. I learn that I cannot be a slave to routine; there is too much in me which craves the exceptional. I begin putting Lisa off: small ways first, then big ways. Another night like all the others suddenly feels consonant with horror. Shock, says Freud, is the necessary precondition of orgasm. While the orgasms I've had with Lisa have been pleasant enough (she's been on the pill for the duration of the relationship), I'm shocked into an awareness of Otherness through sex. The problem is that, strictly speaking, Freud is wrong; sex is (as most eventually learn) usually a domestic sport that holds no surprises. But (unfortunately) domesticated sex leads to bad art. So when I followed the siren away from Lisa, I was following a trail to more words, more images. Is this mature? Where sex and art are concerned, there is no maturity; there are just two imperatives in one puny body, with not too many breaths left, in this universe of a billion years.

## #24

To dwell on that siren call: it isn't really transcendental. It's meant to lift you up, then plonk you back down again (wet or dry, as the case may be). It serves the siren, not you. Trish knows these rules very well, has studied them. Her approach to playing the role is methodical— you give them this much, and then draw back. Not everyone responds to Trish's particular wavelength because it presupposes not just intelligence but artistry. You must be a figure worthy of representation for her to take you seriously. Conversations must shoot up around colors, forms, images. The drunken nights I spend at her studio (white and red wine) are an epiphany. I've never had my mind and body turned on at the same time. Trish knows this; she is going down the checklist. Her postures and gestures are bold and dramatic; when she takes the pins out of her bun and lets her long hair fall down her back, part of me falls, too. It's winter; the studio (three of the four walls being mostly windows) is chilly. I've grown a slight moustache but, at twenty-five, still look boyish. Trish doesn't take my songs or poems seriously; they are unproven, not high enough. My thoughts crave her approval as my body aches for her submission. In this way, we dance. Trish is shrewd; she knows that, with my intense urgency, she must give in (at least once) almost instantly. She likes taking the superior position and her long torso contrasts neatly with Lisa's petite squatness. But (importantly) she hasn't fallen. She's played her part well; I've fallen alone.



## #25

Of human bondage: Trish keeps me down at the heels. It always involves someone else: I get picked up and dropped as others present themselves, disappear. When I fade into the wilderness, it is with an incomplete sense of self. Trish has lopped off a part of me and fastened it to her chest. For eight months, my spirit life is a limbo; I go up and down with Trish's tides. By mid-summer, I have claimed her, using the diabolical as a resource. Yet I still take her with the fierceness born of thwarted passion. At the moment I release myself, her head snaps to the side, there is a sharp intake of breath, and her blue eyes pop open and bulge. My body wants to go into her as far as possible, to get myself back. I learn the pure deliciousness of angry sex. The house she lives in has no central air; we sweat through the long nights. Trish's room looks out on a small courtyard, with a central concrete patch and grass around. When we're stoned, I see Blakean striations in these little grass-plots; the smallness, tenderness, greenness. Me and Trish are often stoned; we escape our jobs, our uncertain futures (are we to be geniuses or nonentities), our sense of a moribund United States (collapsed towers still fresh in our minds), even the brittle hopes that hurt more often than not. The seeds we plant in those little grass-plots spill over onto the concrete.

## #26

When I converse with N on the phone, in about my thirteenth year, our heads open up together, and we create an imaginative landscape out of nothing at all. Events around us, our classmates, notorious or boring or uproarious events of the days get used as fodder, parties, dances, and we hoist the whole rig up and sail it into the sky. We dance ourselves around our desire for each other: are we friends, or could we be more? When we broadcast together, other will sit and listen, spellbound. But to the left and to the right, even at thirteen, is the impulse to share our bodies as well as our souls and brains. N is conservative this way. She maintains a deep need to keep physicality light in and around her— she doesn't play sports, can't swim, is an excellent dancer but not a dab hand as a walker of city blocks, either. All her thoughts are of transcendentalizing past her own body, which is arrayed around her like marsh to wade through. The problem is a hold she wants to maintain over my emotions. We act, often, like newlyweds, but because she will not submit to me physically in any way, my emotions, unconsciously set at a skeptical angle, cannot cleave to her finally, like a ship docking in at a port. Sexual devotion often starts, I learn later, with the body, the physical mechanism. Our bodies are the primordial fact of who, and what we are. So, we talk on the phone for hours, imaginative leap follows imaginative leap, but imaginative leaps are not a basis for a man's devotion. Not that I'm aware of this at thirteen. All I know is that our brains are doing something intense together, and I like the feeling, but my soul craves a reality somewhere between us that cuts deeper, from sharper, starker angles, into a sense of achievement, conquest, victory, a permanent sense of marking and being marked. Later, it is Trish who brings all these algorithms together. She knows only too well what I am, and what I want. We imaginatively leap all over the cosmos together, hand in hand or separately, but the climax, the final imposition of the most profound shared imagination into the most profound imaginative leap, is back into our bodies and, when we are good together, out again, out into a re-entry of the cosmos, as a finality.

## #27

Audrey, as a tangent to N, took the idea, not of broadcasting gossip but of sharing and disseminating literature, as a fait accompli move to establish romance, drama, suspense, and rich entanglement in her life. Prisoner of a rich background, and with a preacher for a father, she latched onto me as a purveyor of sweets for her, from my books to my looks to a sense of deference she wanted me to sometimes have as a way of demonstrating respect for her roots. The one determinative moment— we stood, with a crowd of poets, outside a bar in Andersonville, Chicago, as a night of festivities ended, and I was either going to pick her up somehow or not— ended in, for me, a practical response of denial. Her apartment was in an obscure neighborhood in Chicago, I was staying in the distant 'burb Palatine, and was due in Rockford the next afternoon. For Audrey, as she was later candid about, I was resisting something compelling in the universe which required that we spend the night together. She was heartbroken, with her Indiana-bred sense of being cornfed (blonde, voluptuous, clear complexion), and with the conviction she had that anything she wanted could always be hers. Rich equations suffer greatly from senses of entitlement, emanating from the rich, and dousing all that they touch with a glaze of non-recognition, of obliviousness. This was Audrey's contradiction— give her a text, available to be read at her leisure, incapable of vocalizing need or difference of any kind, and she could rise to the occasion brilliantly. Texts had a way of ejaculating into her brain and heart tissue, in a lovemaking routine (with the right text at the right time) extremely pleasurable for her. As I stood with her outside Moody's Pub, a flesh and blood entity— needy, morose, possibly surprising or disobedient the wrong way— turned her interest tempered with diffidence. This decided the night for us. Had we been ensconced together for several days, as I had been with Wendy, things might have been different. But when two possible lovers are too transient to each other, the magic spells don't work, incantations fall flat, and it is learned again that for equations to take on flesh in the world, there is no substitute for real, raw time.

## #28

I get lost in the social nexus oriented around Trish's house. It's all painters and musicians. Trish has a friend called Tobi who's around a lot. Tobi is tiny and elfin (barely five feet), with an exquisitely sculpted face— cheekbones, blue eyes, full lips. Tobi is another painter and Trish and Tob tend to share things— drugs, guys, ideas. Tob is funnier than Trish and her laughter is contagious. But there's a paranoid strain in her that hates being excluded from things and gets snappish when she feels it happening. Of course, Tob and I desire each other. One night, the three of us happen to be at my apartment. Trish is taking a bath; we're all high. For some reason, Tob and I get in a wrestling match. I pin her to the floor (wall-to-wall beige carpeted), and for a few seconds I hold her down. What is consummated in these moments is the sense we both have that we will eventually sleep together. The three of us live up to Trish's romantic ideal— young, gorgeous, promiscuous artists in an intoxicated ménage. But Tob, unlike Trish, cannot do monogamous relationships (or most other kinds). The extreme regularity of my antics with Trish, once a schedule has been established, cannot be replicated with Tob. I feel it is more intelligent, at this point, to stick to (and with) Trish. We do gain an added sheen of glamour from Tob's presence, and we're all too young to inquire into the nature of glamour: its essential evanescence.

## #29

Tob hovers between straightness and gayness. It is years later; I've broken things off with Trish. We're upstairs at the Khyber, me with my friends, Tob with hers. We're dancing and I start to do touchy-feely moves. This is it; this is the preordained time at which Tob and I consummate things (she put me in my place a year ago because we were both still too close to Trish). I show up at her apartment the next day; she spends the night at my apartment. But there's some fakery involved and our equation involves contingencies: I'm putting together shows for her band, she needs to keep me (for them) in place. We take a bath, and Tob begins giving me a very thorough (and loving) blowjob. The problem is, this won't *count* for me unless we actually have penetrative sex. So I stop myself from finishing in her mouth, take her to bed, put on the condom and do the deed, without finishing. I let my piggish principles interfere with Mother Nature's chosen course. By disobeying Nature, I have already given Tob a reason to mistrust me. The truth is, she will never forgive me for seducing her. She doesn't like guys that much anyway. The kind of impulse that chooses willfulness over acceptance can never have consonance with satisfaction, and pleasure.

### #30

Use of force is anathema to the deepest part of the sexual impulse. A girl like Michelle has precocious parts; but they hinge on her fulfilling the role she has created for herself, of high school Don Juana. She prowls Center City Philly, looking for slightly older guys to hook up with. I'm twenty-three, fresh back from my year in New York City. Michelle has hair dyed black and cut into bangs a la Bettie Page. She has nice, fine features and leans towards the plumpish. Her equation is simple: *let's make this an adventure*. The problem is that this hankering after adventure is a kind of sickness; she'll do anything to escape the confines of the lonely suburbs, and two overbearing parents. The first night I meet her, we make out at 6<sup>th</sup> and Walnut as she waits for her bus. It's a rainy night and we're buffoonish and we get stared at. A feeling of transgression flares up in me which is difficult to overcome; but my youngish looks have put me through this before. Sex, in almost all of its forms, is a hopeless slave to appearances; you get, more often than not, the partners you look like you should get. I've noticed that money doesn't change things that much; you can't buy looks, and, for the most part, you can't buy genuine, organic sex. When age is factored in, sex begins to look like what it largely is: a devious force, a motivating undercurrent, which gives us our greatest consonance with humanity before leaving at its appointed time, when appearances build up too many walls for it to topple.

### #31

Yet quirks and idiosyncrasies facilitate fluidities— we all like what we like, just as we want what we want. For whatever reason, when I break up with Trish for the first time I fall in love with Sara, who I meet at the Last Drop. Sara is just graduating from the University of the Arts, with a journalism degree. She has bright blue eyes, a thick neck, a long, turned-up nose, and a massive bust, and for some reason (she resembles Cara in State College) it works for me. Moreover, she's a would-be occultist who likes what I'm writing for the paper we both write for. The first major break with Trish leaves me confused, restless, and also, given the Center City scene at the time, expectant. Everywhere I went, I found more interesting people. I became sensitized to Sara fast. This sense of being sensitized was not, it appeared to me, reciprocated. It was a simple, and essential, equation: I wanted her more than she wanted me, if she wanted me at all. I felt something where she did not. I knew this by instinct, and tried not to know. Yet, I was allowed, and given her super-hipster status (she's in with all the right bands and DJs), it was a privilege, to get to know her, quirks and all. Sara liked to leave things up in the air; her equation with sex was oriented around speech. That is, Sara liked to talk about sex more than she liked to have it. She loved the intrigue of conversation, rather than flesh meeting flesh; the sparkle of a public tete a tete, rather than actual skin scintillations. I discovered this over a period of months, as I was baffled by Sara's behaviors. She moved me compulsively; I always wanted more of her. The final equation she left me with is this: the wanting is sweeter (and sexier) than the having. But there's something I noticed amiss in this: Sara's equations were frightened. They presupposed a minimum of experience, and a maximum of insecurity on every conceivable level. My failure to physically penetrate Sara devastated me as much as the collapse of my established relationship with Trish. With Sara began a life spent in bars. I learned the right way to tip, to stare, to make successful moves over drinks; all those street level skills were a mountain to climb and a primer to master.

## #32

New Years' Eve, 2004: I meet Patti at a bar off of South Street. We dance and play the usual touchy-feely games. Somehow the timing isn't right— either she's not interested or I'm too distracted. Months go by and I don't see her; then, I'm walking, alone, down Pine Street one spring midnight and Patti staggers into me. She's mushy and I can't make out what she's saying but we squish towards each other anyway. It's a nice squish and so we start sort of going out. Patti doesn't drink just sometimes like Sara does; Patti *requires* drinks. There is something bestial in her soul that only alcohol can conquer. But drinks make you say and do funny things that aren't strictly natural (whereas getting stoned can make things more naturalized) so that Patti and I establish immediately the artificiality of our together equations. Patti likes to speak in tongues, talk gibberish, talk Russian— I humor her. But in our drunkenness I realize that Patti is avoiding completely consummating our relationship. We take walks down side streets in the wee hours and make out and grope against walls; roll in the grass beside the Walnut Street Bridge, my hand in her skirt; but the big caress never happens. Everything has to be drama, everything has to be public, and since we can't have sex in public we might as well not have it at all. Then, she starts to torture me with other barfly guys. This is life *in the street*; not within reaching distance of the godly, or the diabolical. *You make your image what it is, then you are what your image is*— that's the basic street equation.



### #33

Trixie Belle is the ultimate barfly. This is a woman who begins the day with a six-pack. She then orients all other activities around her drinks. Her primary occupation consists of latching on to guys who will provide her free alcohol for prolonged periods of time. This equation includes the possibility of sex, but Trixie Belle is shrewish, has a history of sexual abuse in her family and can never actually *have* sex. The facts are the facts: Trixie Belle is ravishingly, inescapably gorgeous. She's 5'6, long-legged and thin; her face has the sharpness and the contours of a *Vogue* model's; straight auburn hair falls down her back and in bangs over her eyes. She's the kind of woman you can see once on the street and never forget. In spurts, she puts together bands and writes songs. Though a master of the fine art of couch surfing, most of Trixie Belle's money (there's not much of it) comes from her Mom, and she still has a bedroom in her Mom's two-story house in Upper Darby. I fall into Trixie Belle the way most guys fall into Trixie Belle: by mistaking her gorgeousness for inner radiance. Over several nights, a routine establishes itself: we meet at a bar and I buy her a few drinks; we then migrate to another bar and I buy her a few more drinks, etc. I look for excuses to play touchy-feely games; I accustom myself to considering Trixie Belle a new conquest. Motions are made to get Trixie Belle back to my apartment. Trixie Belle gets nasty when she sees the Penn degree on my wall; she needs an *obedient mirror*, I have become a disobedient one. As the night progresses, I see my illusions grated like cheese into little flakes.

### #34

Trixie Belle has taken up a pair of scissors, is looking for things in my apartment to stab. She settles on a few of my chairs that have covers on them. I'm drunk and don't have the will to resist. She stabs away and it becomes a metaphor for what I could do inside her. I live on the second story and there are many windows facing the street. Several tenants in the buildings across the street are watching Trixie Belle's exhibitionistic display. She decides to do interpretive dances to enhance the performance and I find myself severed from whatever innocence I might have left. I see, through Trixie Belle, that many people do lead pointless lives. The only equation that really moves Trixie Belle is a simple one: anything that lives needs to be destroyed. As I follow her movements, I realize two things: that she wants to destroy me, and that she's not shrewd enough to realize that her best strategy (like Trish's) is to give and then take away, rather than not to give at all. At the end of the night, Trixie Belle strips and gets into bed with me; but I'm not allowed to touch. Her skin is perfect and porcelain-like; her breasts show no hint of sag. But she's been abused; her perfection is brittle and, beneath the madness, cold.

### #35

I meet Heather in a bar; I have created a context in which bars are the only place to do social business. Everyone in the arts wants to get drunk; unfortunately, I learn that not everyone in the arts is actually an artist. For every soul that goes up over words, images, or sounds, there are ten souls that lust after praise, glamour, and intrigue. Now I have cohorts that help me do business in the arts. Our business is to recruit artists to perform in one of our shows. Because all of us happen to be males, the competition levels among us over females is intense (we're all more or less straight). When a new woman sits down with us (who may or may not prove to be one of our prize performers), it's off to the races. Heather sits down and Mick happens to be more on the ball than me. Everything he says hits the bull's eye; all his moves lock into Heather's. The exquisite anguish of living in bars; when someone else's moves work and yours don't. What's pitiable about all of us is that we live in these anguished edges; everything hinges on social contingencies. You watch someone else move in for the kill, and feel your own dryness. Later, this changes; Heather falls for my moves. What I learn is that in this jungle atmosphere, all positive contacts can be useful. Because I don't snap or cock block Mick, Heather becomes someone held in reserve. The problem with all of these levels is that they turn human beings into chess pieces. You can't go up, you can only move around on the board. Bars and street life harden people into rigid postures that are difficult to efface. If you fall in love with this hardness, you become a flush.

### #36

When I take Lisa to bars, there's still an edge of innocence. We often feel like intruders; we haven't learned the rules and folkways. But Trixie Belle is the one who puts the zap on my head about bars, and the lives that play themselves out there. When I meet her years later, she hasn't changed much. Her posture, the image it creates, is still hard. This time, however, I have graduated out of bars. I can no longer stand the posturing, the moves, the head-games. Trixie Belle refuses, as before, to be touched much. I can run my hands all over her body but her clothes stay on. The situation disintegrates because this time I won't buy her drinks. If she wants a six-pack for breakfast, she has to pay for it herself; if she's going to enter my apartment, she's not to do any damage. To the extent that anyone, male or female, can tame Trixie Belle, I have tamed her. In six years, I have learned certain things. I know that, whatever outward circumstances determine one's life, having a mind of some cleanliness matters most. There are clean bums and dirty Presidents; clean janitors and dirty CEOs. Whatever I say to Trixie Belle, it's put through such a damaged filter that nothing gets in, nothing is retained; so what is she doing here? My weakness dictates that if a beautiful woman wants some kind of succor, I will give it to her; that I am a servant to all forms of female beauty. I have my own cleanliness issues and this is one of them.

Bars work into sex equations; so does travel. When Wendy and I hook up in New England, we manifest not only guts and bravado, but glamor. We are transients there, doing what transients do. What I make with Kyra, who shares a large flat in the East Village with one of her also-fashionista friends, is even more gruesomely constructed. Kyra is John's sister. John and I are running the Philly Free School together. When we stop off to spend the day with Kyra in Manhattan, and then the night, I know instantly that (as is gruesome to admit I could be this crass) I can make a score here. Kyra is drastically, dramatically about charm, glamor, and intrigue. The raven-haired, buxom look she favors is pure Liz Taylor, skin slightly bronzed more than Liz, and, most importantly, a physiology which does not say (as most physiologies do) no instantly. All her postures, jests, glances suggest there is room in her. Yet with John to think of (this is his sister), the transient sucker punch into bed would depend on me being (as Wendy had been to her benefactors in New Hampshire) more brutish than usual. Decentered away from our personal norm, against a novel backdrop, in the middle of a period of expansion and growth, why shouldn't I be brutish? Now's the time. At a bar not far from her flat, John and I hold court. Here is Samantha, a friend of mine from the old Manhattan days. We flirt outrageously, too. I've got a girl on either side of me on an elegant sofa (Manhattan, more than Philly, favors sofas in bars). John is bemused. Punch-drunk on all the attention, I understand that Samantha lives too far away, in the recesses of Brooklyn. Tonight it must be Kyra, or no one. John is also high as a kite and more tolerant than most. When the three of us tumble drunkenly back into Kyra's apartment, the crunch comes. I'm either going to make a play to sequester myself in Kyra's room with Kyra or be more civil with John, and less pushy generally. Fortunately or unfortunately (and channeling, perhaps, Baudelaire's Good Devil), I feel the game within me, and have just the right concoction running through my veins to see it through to the end. A bar is a game; travel is a game, often, too; and when game-stakes are raised, you either rise to the occasion or you don't. The door is eventually shut on John, who can't not laugh (welcome to P.F.S., right?), and I am alone with Kyra. The night is hot, her room not air conditioned. We don't talk much. I find myself riding the game, pushing the river, and what happens is not masterful or revelatory, but adequate. The fashionista appurtenance items (mostly clothes to be debuted, turned in to authorities, or discarded), sounds of the East Village beneath us, even Marlboro Reds to smoke (not my usual brand), all coalesce into a sense that having started on one square on a game board (that's bar-talk), I've done a game version of a check-mate. I've been a Zen arrow into space the right way. Even as I am not unaware that deeper questions and resonances are being unanswered, and John has real reason to be annoyed. For the night, I am Kyra's appurtenance item and she mine. This inverts who I am with Trish and Jena, but once the action's over and Kyra's asleep, there's no way out. The equation is: you did it, and that's it.

## #38

Some situations cannot be cleansed. Dell comes to the Last Drop on a headhunt for me. She has her black hair cut short like a 1920s flapper; she's tall, ungainly (not fat, but loose-limbed), and her blue eyes are guileless. She has rules— we have to hang out once before we sleep together; when she does make it to my apartment, her nerves dictate that we fall quickly and efficiently into bed. We make love, and I wear a condom. She's not enthusiastic or unresponsive— she likes me, but not too much. Her equation involves impulses— if she suddenly wants you and if you want her, you're in luck. Nothing can be planned too methodically— sex just has to erupt with some kind of Virgoan perfection (her sign), and then there it is. I choose, however foolishly, blunt honesty as the best tactic in this situation. Dell, at twenty-three, has never had a genuine relationship and is easily humiliated. I don't particularly realize this, but it sinks in that hit and runs have only a small chance of going up. It has taken me into my thirties to ascertain the emptiness of two foreign bodies— how sex can be a natural disaster.

### #39

That first spring I spent in State College, Hope swept hopelessly away from my friends and I as a siren. With her pitch black hair, dark eye make-up, Cure shirts, she embodied the mystery of the Gothic, which was a countercultural subtext in the Nineties about outsiderism, what it meant to subsist as a freak in the world. I didn't know what she would be like up close— as of August, and the fall semester starting, the dimensional angle hit me as hard as Hope did, who was not taking no for an answer, with any of us. The attitude, once you gained access to her room, was as pure Don Juana as it could be. When she, frankly, pulled off her panties and offered me her crotch, the heat of it made me swoon, so that I could only half-function. She was too bold, too blunt. All of her was fiercely dark, and the fade into her was to cleave to the darkness. Yet, the tactile thing, about lovemaking and sex and the right kinds of delicacy and the right blend or savior faire towards mixing seductiveness, aggression, and restraint, was beyond her. Hope wanted sex to manifest as a Gothic ideal, a stand taken for burrowing into each other's permanent, corrosive darkness. What two bodies are actually supposed to do to make sex a something pleasurable, was not a relevant reality, when all that black eyeliner spoke more. All of which meant that sex here fell down, past her sharp jaw-line, bulging eyes, and exotically wrought face, into a way of demonstrating rebellion, obstinacy against the normative, but also awkwardness between two bodies hardening and softening in and out of harmony with each other, with their own nudity, and with an attitude too militant, too fierce. I learned that, movies and other cultural talisman objects aside, real sex requires real tenderness, for men as well as women, and when tenderness goes missing, so, generally, does ecstasy.

## #40

The negative wisdom I learn from Trish is much trickier. Because she gives me her body, without stint or reservation, I never quite realize what she takes back for herself. She has my emotions on a string; she holds the passkeys to my moods; my days are oriented around her. Because she is sparing in the way she presses my sore spots, it's difficult to notice that she's mastered them— where they are, how to tweak them. Over a period of years, she learns sophisticated techniques to keep my string ties to her tautened. One favorite button has to do with the past, or what Joyce calls "The Dead": when she zaps me with past lovers, I dance madly. Or, that she's suicidal— nothing lasts, nothing's worth it (which means, of course, I'm not worth it either). I dance into my caretaker suit and try to hit the right buttons on her switchboard; but she's better at hiding things than I am. It is her best trick to make me responsible for her entire existence. Because I try to and cannot make her want to live, I'm a failure and an embarrassment. The only thing that goes up about this situation is its extremity— the high sense of drama she builds into her flourishes. She'll be Ophelia, even if I refuse to be Hamlet. She twirls in circles, makes herself dizzy; drinks, intoxicates herself; pictures herself in a Gothic romance. I'm as enthralled as I am stymied by my own impotence. There's so much beauty to Trish's spectacles; but they fall down when you realize her essential aim is selfish. She needs to maintain her position as the center of attention. She leaves permanent scars, with all this negative wisdom, but my truth is simple: no one wants to be completely mastered.



## #41

Lisa is as close as I've come to completely mastering someone. Lisa's ambitious; she comes from a working-class background. She sees all the middle-class status symbols around me and feels she must serve me, even though my moods and need to create seem obscure to her. Moreover, I am a status symbol for her at her place of employment— I actually do shows, perform regularly in a major metropolis, record my music. The glamour of this rubs off on Lisa, but also intimidates her. I learn from Lisa the kind of smallness that some people feel about themselves and their lives. It's not just that Lisa doesn't have many large thoughts; it's that she deliberately limits her thoughts to narrow avenues. Yet this is not from lack of brain-power; Lisa scored higher on the SATs than I did. It's just that large thoughts carry with them the vertiginous unease of the sublime. This willful sense of limitation carries over into our bed— Lisa instinctively makes the same moves every time we make love. Lisa makes herself easy to master because she makes herself static; and she does it to please me. Her equation presupposes that what I want I will always want. How much in human relationships can be reduced to habit?

## #42

Intermittence equations are relevant to every relationship. Most people love to have a lover leave and then return. The problem with Trish's return is that we still have the same problems we had the first time. We have burrowed too deeply into each other; Trish still enjoys sex in the abstract (as an element of Gothic fiction, with her as the heroine) more than she enjoys the physical act. As I get older, I want to give as well as receive pleasure; but Trish is never pleased. As my body satisfies itself, I realize Trish is not on the journey with me. Even a satiated body can get bored with its own satiety. We still escape into movies and marijuana; we still make an enjoyable spectacle as a couple. But too much needs fixing and fixing things is not usually a romantic process. We aren't effortlessly floating up from the surface; we're pushing through bullshit to find the surface again. Trish has no interest in fixing things; to be workmanlike is beneath her. So we hit the same old impasses and do the same old dances. When Trish flushes us this time, it sticks; when I feel uncharitable, I call her a female Peter Pan. Trish has turned intermittence into a stasis; she has frozen herself into her role as temptress, romantic heroine, Ophelia. Romantic heroines don't need to fix things; everything happens naturally, narratives move things along. But I'm in my thirties and I realize that when anyone hardens against changes, relationships become unworkable. Somewhere between Trish and Lisa, a happy medium exists— some reliability, some intermittence. As of 31, I haven't found it, and I become lost, up for anything.

### #43

When you're lost and up for anything, it becomes down at the heels to decide what you want. I'm thirty-one and in the process of getting my PhD. I meet Arti at a reading thrown by MFA students at a bar on South Street. Though I happen to be in the process of wooing someone else, Arti is insistent. She's Bangladeshi, with long, luxuriant black hair, darkish complexion, and large breasts. After mysteriously landing at my table, she clutches my hand under the table. There is so much insistence in her grasp, I receive the impression that Arti has been secretly coveting me for some time. But when we return to my place, everything goes amiss. Arti is a beleaguered Muslim trying to fit in at an American university; a nascent novelist who writes brilliant pieces that nevertheless do not cohere; and a miserable human being who relishes her misery. As we writhe around, it occurs to me that I have become the male version of a slut. They have a name for this at Temple: *man-whore*. I am someone who will take whatever a willing woman will give me. I can be taken by force, stealth, or subtlety. I have no boundaries. The only element that redeems me from the condition of a thirty-something Peter Pan is that the ladies, like Arti, come to me. Arti twists, and turns, and writhes; now she is throwing a fit about having broken one of her laws. My role is to assist her in finding the right pitch and key for her fugues. I fecklessly hope that this, unlike all the other encounters, will turn into a relationship. But it soon becomes apparent that Arti's rages are as boundless as my fecklessness. When Arti *cuts*, she doesn't mess around; we'll probably never speak again. I'm left with the soul-hollowness of one who repeats mistakes.

## #44

There has never been, in all of this, a moment of being totally lost, derelict. I have always been able to locate myself somewhere. When I meet Zeld on the R6, I immediately sense the electricity of some kind of intercourse between us. What I want most is revenge on Trish for having slept outside the relationship. Zeld is tall, brown-haired but freckled, a sort-of-into the arts type. She likes to show up in hippie dresses, get down to business fast, and then leave. I don't feel lost about this; I need to get revenge, Zeld is available; but this is my most derelict moment as a lover. There is nothing between Zeld and I, no redemptive seams holding the construct together. Our sex happens to make a point to someone else, because Trish and I are not only competitive, we would kill to get an edge on each other. The deep loneliness we escape via competitive gains never gets resolved; the empty spaces in us never organically fill. When Zeld dances out of my life, I forget that she ever danced in. The games begin with Trish again, and with renewed intensity. I win by thrusting, she wins by yielding; and our souls experience prolonged periods of sustained ugliness. In love, reversals occur that take years to decode. In public, Trish and I move into high spectacle mode— there are parties, brawls, ménages. I never think what the punishment for this will be— that having navigated to a home that turns out to be no home, I lose consonance with knowing what a home is, and how I can help to build one.

Growing up with Emma, who had been in my class at CHS, wasn't like growing up with Roberta. It wasn't like anything. Emma, a lanky blonde with long, lank blonde hair, a chiseled, cat-like face, and long limbs, looked like a stunt double for Trish, and had been merely an acquaintance. She was quiet, and kept to herself. Her friends were among the geeks of the class. Why and how Emma knew to show up now, in the midst of all this turbulence with Trish, I have no idea, but she did. I laughed because she so resembled Trish, but I was also aroused. I liked the idea, past N and Roberta, of a real hook-up within my class, even ten years after the fact. She was there, at the Last Drop, on a succession of key summer days, in a sleeveless white blouse. After all these years, her cat-face grew on me as enchanting, compelling, suggestive of something her whole presence insinuated— she identified heavily with Trish, and had a female impulse to demarcate turf which could also be hers. Whether she'd been stalking us or just heard what was happening with us from the suburbs, I still don't know. I knew she was commuting to Center City from somewhere. What she wanted was just one night with me, I later concluded. When, on the one late afternoon I made my way with her back to Logan Square, we were ensconced, she took out a bottle of Robitussin as though it were an aperitif, and she were Trixie Belle. She wanted, as she said, a Robo-trip. It was part of the magic of that night that Emma wound up encapsulating for me so many different partners at once, including partners merely being anticipated. I found it easy to begin making love to her, because she made it easy. Her equation was interesting, about female levels of awareness— everything about her physiology screamed, you always wanted me the most, but you just didn't know it. You're a man— you don't know these things. I have delivered myself to you because you need me now, and I need you. Now you may begin to learn who you are. And we made love with great fluidity and rapidity, and then we made love again. Her fluidity was like Heather's would be, and the sense of being lulled into a trance of perpetual, high-intensity intercourse, on the bed, then on the living room floor, on the couch in the living room, from the front, from the back, was like Jena. We each gave the other a show-stopping performance, manifesting (as was odd, and as I was not too dumb and callow to notice) an inversion of our years of starving for each other. The absolute ecstasy of several mutual orgasms was the tactile insignia, as it might've been with Roberta and N, of an eternity of denial overcome. This, even as what was built into us both had been noticed only by her. Why, in sex equations, women usually hold the cards: women are receptive to sensory data on a deeper level than men, and have a primordial understanding of physiology, of bodies and more bodies, which men do not. When bodies speak, women listen more. Emma and I shared a home, but only she registered what our bodies shared, what was in them. When Trish showed up, it was a red flag from nature that it would be Emma's time to show up too. Even if it proved to be the cosmic design that after one night, I would never see Emma again.

## #46

I often feel most at home with Lisa, because she so wants me to be her home. Thanksgiving 2000, we are at my family's house in Glenside. This has everything Lisa wants— the façade of solid middle-class consonance; plenty of food, central heating, an edge of refinement (my Mom's art-prints lining every room). After the family has retired for the night, Lisa and I sneak out to smoke a bowl in the back yard. As we gaze up at the stars, there is nothing between us but warmth, ease, comfort. We shuffle down to the basement (where we are to sleep on the fold-out couch) and make love with complete abandon. The pot has loosened us up so that our bodies tangle gloriously. We come with two separate but equal exclamation points. Lisa's gush is more about the circumstances than it is about me— the house and the food are her orgasms. But the circumstances, tweaked away from our normal ones, add an edge of novelty and giddiness. What Lisa really wants is to get married, to make this situation permanent. Her best tactic (she thinks) is complete submission. I (as usual) don't know what I want; Lisa occupies a niche like Jena did. Because Trish is as solidly middle-class in her roots as I am, because we have shared similar experiences, Trish never completely feels the need to submit to me. Our best sex happens as a counterbalance to the routine betrayals that characterize our relationship. I am only ever an object to Lisa, despite her subservience; the fold-out bed, clean sheets, and wall-to-wall carpeting are bracketed into her equation of who I am. Solid material roots are what she wants the most in her.

## #47

Oddly, Jena reacts against my middle-class roots, as if they are distasteful or deceitfully earned. Jena is demure and polite with my family; but there is an edge of defensiveness to her reactions. She shuts down rather than opening up, as Lisa does. When we sneak off to my bedroom to make love, Jena takes it as a welcome break and respite to duties and obligations she cannot, and will not, fulfill. She is proud of her family's nobility and simplicity; her ambitions involve maintenance of who she is, rather than a climb towards a new self, via material means. The truth, however, is that my family is far more friendly to Jena than her family is to me. Jena's family demonstrates no consonance with the arts; minimal conversational skills; insipid tastes; and the same edge of defensiveness that Jena has. So in-law miseries immediately begin to impinge on our little marriage. The only way Jena and I seem to work is alone; we thrive when marooned on little desert islands. We are so genuinely moved by each other's bodies that the relevant equation is simple: touch, touch, touch. I have more extended sex with Jena than I ever have with anyone else: hours after languorous hours, so that we are lifted up over our bodies simply from having emptied them. We're too young to realize how transcendental the engagement is— you could call it just kids being kids. But at least, not having delved into the normative crusts of ambition and betrayal, we do these things with the ripeness and purity that they can only have once.

Trish tells so many horror stories about her parents that they have assumed legendary status before I even meet them. They are white-collar, devout Christian WASPs; they live in a large, conventionally furnished house in Media. Because all three daughters are grown up, there's not much left to fill the house; it strikes me as being both too empty and too clean. Trish's horror stories involve alcoholism, sexual abuse, philandering, and rampant meanness; I see none of these things. But I realize, through Trish, that the WASP psyche dotes on artful evasions, permanently closed doors, and freshly scrubbed, polished surfaces. The WASP version of nice is predicated on a perpetual need for surface maintenance; for all of Trish's buffoonish antics, put a stranger in front of her and she becomes a model of propriety. As I sit down to dinner with Trish and her parents, I'm amazed at Trish's sudden transformation into dutiful daughter. There's nothing extravagant about the food, because of course these WASPs aren't going to waste their money wooing their black sheep artist daughter and her boyfriend. But the surface of the conversation remains unruffled. It is only when Trish's mother claims to be "so-so on the gays and the blacks" that a rupture occurs. She also finds time to remind us that "you can never be too rich or too thin." The problem I hear with this WASP is that she has absolutely no sense of irony. She lives straightforwardly on the surface and naively hopes that nothing else exists. She's a housewife; but her social position, she believes, is immensely elevated by her husband's funds and the God that provided them.



## #49

Trish and I are both buffoons; when we see Trish's family we are often stoned. One Christmas I spend with Trish's family, I am asked to bring my guitar. I do, and the whole family sings along to old Beatles songs. Trish's sisters are as attractive as she is; Trish plays the usual competitive games sisters play. Usually, the mood isn't all that festive. Trish's parents want what most traditional WASP families want for their daughters; to have her marry into money, so that she might be off their hands. As I realize this quite consciously, and know that in this family's eyes I'm no less a failure and a flush than their daughter is, it's interesting to feel a sense of almost-acceptance at these dinners. That my roots are unclean tilts things even more formidably against me; but I enjoy the education I'm receiving nonetheless. I learn, for the first time, the absurdity of middle-class, church-going, white-bread America— folks that vote Republican as a matter of course, elevate themselves by considering their brand of normalcy the only Godly one, and don't need to rationalize the way that Catholics and Jews do, because they have no guilt or shame to begin with.

## #50

I learn from Trish the rules of intoxication. As you lift off, you leave behind everything in your consciousness that is tinged towards the mundane. Normal space/time dimensions need not apply; everything happens in a realm of perfected imbalance, expected surprise. Trish has lived with drug dealers; has spent years in circumstances extreme enough that ingesting hard chemicals becomes like brushing one's teeth. Trish does, in fact, find states of intoxication cleaner than sobriety. A sober mind dwells on hard facts; hard facts for Trish have no endurance. Trish wants every lover to be Lord Byron; every night to contain and perpetuate Greek-level dramas; and to be a heroine in such a world grants a crown of flame, of radiance, that Trish covets. But dramas demand conflicts; I learn that Trish will rock the boat for no other reason than this. There's always a solution sweet; but Trish enjoys the solution less than the problem. She wants to see me riled; there's always an impressive array of red flags at her disposal. When she does her seven-veiled dances, she can use her various highs to create a palpable ethereality. I never have any choice (once the drama has been set in motion) but to resolve the tension with a push into her, and a denouement involving another bowl, drink, pill. Consummate sensuality can have no reasonable end; it has to be pushed to its limits to be really tasted. This equation threatens to overtake my existence. They are a distraction from a shrewish reality— that the greatest escapists invariably have the most onerous obstacles and daunting responsibilities to escape from.

## #51

To be a young artist in the aughts in America— what could be a more daunting task? It's this Trish and I are escaping from; the sense that we are both fighting a tremendously uphill battle. We cower behind our years— we're young, in our mid-twenties, and we're not (necessarily) supposed to have scaled any mountains yet. We cower behind our dreams, our ideals; behind the inebriated joy of our bodies; and behind the consonance we have with dead masters. We train ourselves not to look at the odds, because the odds are against us. Yet we take for granted our own genius and the eventual dispersion of the world's riches at our feet. How seriously are we taken? We dismiss commentary from unenlightened sources which, if seriously considered, cuts off genius. How we separate is over discipline. My work ethic demands daily performance and permanent obeisance; Trish spaces things out so that many of her days are untouched by the rigors of creation. I drive hard at certain goals; Trish wavers between obeisance to her self-destructive impulses and her creative instincts. The net result of this contradiction is that she often has less to show for her efforts than I do. But we live in a time in which such distinctions are often unapparent; and I am more invested in Trish's eventual success than she is in mine. Her selfishness assumes too much— not just superior genius, but the laxity it can endow genius with. Assured of her future glory, she can intoxicate herself without due restraint. The darkness I sense in us manifests as an intuition that realities (especially political) are being ignored— that we are living irresponsible lives.

How Trish and I most go up is through words. Sometimes when we talk (often late at night, and when our bodies have spent themselves) we reach an elevated state of understanding; a sense of having transcended the shackles of normal consciousness. This is true intoxication, and cuts into us more (and with greater rapidity, satisfaction) than drugs do. We read through Donne's "The Ecstasy" and then bear it out in performative terms— eyes interlocked, extremities touching. We are both classicists and the notion of aligning ourselves with age-old wisdom arouses us. In our shared mythology, the American landscape does not exist— we do our dances with and obeisance to Albion, and our purer roots attach us to English thoughts, objects, senses of art's victory over materiality, war, and history. Trish has other dwelling spots— Renaissance Italy fascinates her. The humanism she espouses is Renaissance humanism; the nobility and expressiveness of the human form, its many contours and lights. As the years wear on, I realize that Trish is stuck in the mode of replication. She wants to compress the Renaissance into the twenty-first century. I leave the nineteenth century behind and initiate a quest for a contemporary muse, one that integrates rather than replicates. But our shared voyage through four or five centuries of high art is our greatest and most lasting shared accomplishment.

### #53

Most of my key scenes with Trish play themselves out in West Philadelphia. It is a blasted landscape—filthy, litter-strewn streets, crime, poverty. But there is a pleasing rustic aspect to many of the houses; early twentieth-century built, ivy strewn. By the time we are in our thirties, Trish lives in an apartment building on 49<sup>th</sup> off of Baltimore. The roof is slanted, paved in black-top; and there is a fire escape attached to Trish's apartment where we can loaf. We still smoke pot in bits; we have maintained our physical relationship. Trish is bored; she wants some of the old drama back. As summer wears on, Trish comes to the conclusion that the finest tactic in her arsenal, where the reinvigoration of our relationship is concerned, is to break it off. She is assured that I will pursue her again with renewed passion. Meanwhile, the country has sunk into a collective depression. The cost of living skyrockets; people begin to use their credit cards for every purchase. My first books come out and are well-received; but poetry is a limited context, and the buffoonery of the Philly poetry scene is unsurpassed. All in all, this is a time of malaise and discontent; a time in which artists generally do not feel treasured or even valued. The national malaise is seeping into personal dramas; Trish and I are no exception.

## #54

Lisa has dramatic moments; however, unlike Trish, she is unable to make them stick. Trish is able to make her dramas go up— they incorporate myth, history, and the ineluctable nature of hostile circumstances. Lisa is crass, and when she has panic attacks, they cause discomfort that rivets negative attention on her vulgarity. Moreover, I am looking for a way out, an ostensible reason to pursue Trish over Lisa. I learn for the second time that physical sparks lose their luster over long periods of time— things get stale, and the movements, gestures, and contours that were once enticing become repulsive. I see that Lisa and I have mostly a relationship of convenience, a kind of sham marriage— what never coalesces seems more important than what does. People become habits to each other and spend vast amounts of time (months, years, decades, life-times) in sham relationships just to create the impression of being loved, of belonging somewhere. That real love never enters the equation is an irrelevant issue to them. What is real love? Real love is something Trish and I learn about— a shared movement upwards, a companionship towards higher realities, an unwillingness to deny that stasis is a dominant factor in the human world.

Yet, I was later to learn, I didn't lose nothing when I lost Lisa. Simplicity I could never get from Trish, or Jena. Lisa at her best could make something elegant from simplicity— rituals honed and refined, pleasing repetitions. Our courtly, considerate bedroom routines had a way of haunting me when I later realized I would have to live, with many people and in many contexts, with inconsideration. Even her ordinary appearance remained arousing to me; combined with an acknowledgement that my departure from her life had been both disruptive and abusive to her. Lisa's own magnetism guaranteed that there were soon other men in her life; my absorption in Trish meant that I didn't notice much. We were reduced to a position of making no dramatic gestures to each other. For the last months I spent in her presence, she continued to visibly spite Trish and more or less ignore me; I had no reason to disrespect her. In my leaving our marriage, and bothering to cheat into another one, I lost a kind of virginity. Now, with Trish, I entered into a marriage conceived in a context which involved treachery. I was no longer innocent. Trish carried with her a disdain for innocence anyway; as did Tob; with a heavy overlay not only of what she'd done in sex and relationships, but of what she'd done (like Tob) to get drugs. I avidly bought weed then, and was always holding, an incentive (I noticed) for Trish and Tob to stay with me. That part of their lives— how to procure drugs for themselves— guaranteed that things could never be simple for them. Lisa could take or leave pot, and the rest of it. No artistic compulsion pushed her into an abrasive, tumultuous ring. Thus, Lisa had a strong foundation towards retaining both innocence and the capacity for simplicity. Trish and Tob had addictions which forced them, and me with them, to live on a knife-edge.

Jena has very specific, very naïve notions about love. Love is faith— you believe in someone else. But Jena’s version of love presupposes a static sense of self, and an equally static sense of the Other. If you change, you must not change profoundly— there must be a continuous, coherent presence that subsists from one change to another. The conflict is that most mutual upwards movements change things (consciousness, emotional matter) irreparably. As soon as it becomes clear that this is what Jena’s vision is (once the initial thrill of perpetual physical intercourse has subsided), I realize that nothing between us can coalesce. She bars her remarks in such a way as to suggest that I’m not who she believed me to be— a simple, unchanging soul. As things burn down to the wire, I realize that Jena’s ideals dictate that no one will ever exist for her except as a shadow of these ideals. She will project her ideals onto many, and see who mostly closely conforms to their striations. When I read through her letters many years later, I am stunned that I could’ve fooled her for as long as I did. But there’s not much room for reality in human relationships and by the time I reread these letters, I have my own formulated ideals. What redeems me, in my own estimation, is the facticity of my awareness— that the idea of an actualized human ideal is fallacious, and that honesty consonance on this level has its own way of going up.



With all her very real purity, innocence, and receptivity, Jena has to fade. The reasons are amorphous, and I'm confused because the culture Jena comes out of is both alien and hostile to me. It will take me twenty years to even divine what the thoughts on the surface of Jena's mind are, why she's awash in stress. Across the hall from her room in Leete Hall is Cara, who I meet elsewhere, am stunned to realize is placed where she is. Cara is raven-haired, small-busted, blue-eyed, taller than average though not as tall as Jena, pretty but bruised looking. She has perpetual bags under her eyes. She is from the same background Jena is, but has more of a hinge to being a brain in the world. Her emotions fasten closely to what grades she's receiving semester to semester in her classes. Cara offers her room as an alternate place to hang out now that Jena and I are fighting. I am too young to understand how rivalries between pretty girls from small towns go, and how I am being used as a pawn in a power game Cara is playing. Yet Cara has a sense of waste and being wasted about her life, and an appearance of being exquisitely wrapped up in secret difficulties. I find her difficult to decipher. When Jena and I formally end in October, I find it difficult not to wonder if I can just jump, as it were, into Cara, and start something new. My equation is extreme confusion in all directions. The two small town beauties know what the score is more than me. Yet the rules and regulations of their upbringings mean that silence must be on the menu in my direction.

When Jena and I officially break-up, I'm left with confusion, perplexity, and a sense of being powerless. But there's a semester on, classes to go to, papers to write, and I continue writing creatively on the side. It's easy to smush into whatever with Cara, who also works at the North Halls Dining Commons with me, because the deeper levels of toppling a marriage are not ones I'm prepared to confront or assimilate yet. After several weeks of hanging out, marked by Cara's teasing games (there are guys she grew up with and who she's still attached to not far from State College), I finally bust through her reverses one night, and we make love. It's to the point, fast, and over. It hits me in the guts that that's it. We'd now both achieved our goal. In another words, another marriage, after my marriage to Jena, will not follow hard on the heels of it. When I realize that the physical relationship is to be that brief, I enter into more confusion. Now, the equation has changed into a kind of hyper-criinge. There's something at hand, that Cara and Jena both know more than me about, and I'm being kept in the dark. Jena has disappeared completely. There's no sign of her in Leete Hall or anywhere else. Cara withdraws at least part of the way into a shell. The momentum of the semester pushes me forward, but part of me is flip-flopping, in a stagnant fashion, a fish out of water, trying to reconcile the surface of my life with what's in the depths. After all these years, Cara's equation is still a mystery to me; what she was doing there, in Leete Hall, to me and to Jena. And if, for some reason, anyone sent her. The further, important equation to understand is that relationships and relationship equations do not and cannot happen in a vacuum. The human world is only too happy to take the organicism of purity equations like the ones I had with Jena and force them to compromise themselves into fakeries, or ambiguities, or both.

## II. Antithesis

## #59

Here's the complicated equation: if there isn't much reality in human relationships, but you have to have them, you must embrace the responsibility of making them as realistic as possible. There can be no *I am just this, you are just that*: the realistic approach is one that fastens and binds to nothing. Jade will be over in a few hours and, as I prepare myself, I realize that to not-fasten leaves one perpetually unequipped. But somehow it doesn't matter—the clench of dissolution is so sweet that no one ever recovers from it. This clench has its own transcendental reality, and if what dissolution really is remains permanently out of our grasp, authoritative judgments must be suspended. Jade is smallish, about 5'2, with long, straight brown hair that falls down her back, delicate Virgo features, and a mien brought to level pitch by many wounds. When we make love, I am forced to be gentler— gone are the thrashings and poundings, and I find myself in a new position, playing a new role. Jade is an actress, and every gesture she makes is nuanced, deliberate, complex.

## #60

Jade keeps pulling surprises. I'm stunned because she does this with a certain amount of levity, as though anything that startles goes up. The drugs she ingests take her to a realm of crystallized perfection, in which she cuts through open spaces like a human blade. Because I am willing to follow her, she initiates me into the mysteries of this realm. I find that my edge is blunted, because in many ways it is a false edge—artificially produced, unstable, past any form of measurement. Nevertheless, when we meet in the middle our edges coalesce. Alright, so this is artificial, she says; what and who gets to define the natural? Can you even tell me what the natural is? I admit that I can't, and this admission transpires at a moment of maximum vulnerability for both of us. Are we razors or mirrors? Jade inhabits a world of hollow forms, which she hovers above—my role in her life is to contradict her thesis, that we might create a dialectic. As we move towards synthesis, Jade places one of her hands on my face, puts her forehead to mine. She knows that there is a sting in her hollowness for me, who would prefer to see fullness. But we go on like this for hours without knowing what or who we are. The depth of this place eats into my eyes, but (as Jade is learning) I enjoy being eaten—chewed, swallowed, digested.

## #61

I walk around my apartment, bottoming out. I'm not hungry enough to eat, too tired to sleep. Because right now I'm seeing *through* things, I know that Jade's entry into my life isn't such a big deal. She actively courts states of impermanence; everything she does is calculated not to last. All her relationships are posited along an axis of attraction/repulsion. But I have inherited enough of her hollowness that right now it doesn't matter. I gaze out the window at the SEPTA trains, wires, 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station off in the distance; I remember the eternal charm of action, movement, dynamism. When you get in a train, you transcend an entire life you leave behind. Yet every human life has to balance stasis and movement. It's something Trish never mastered— how to move and not move simultaneously. Trish demands absolutes— absolute movements, absolute stillness. I have learned that the only absolute in the universe is existence itself— something will always exist. I don't pretend to know how, or what, or why. I've left all the shot-glasses out; Jade forgot her cigarettes, American Spirits. I fish one out of her pack and light it.

## #62

Jade, like Trish, likes to zap me with past lovers. Brian, at one point, was a music industry bigwig whose appetites led him into lethargy and destitution. Jade learned all the cocaine tricks she knows from Brian— sleep quotients, food quotients, how much to buy and when. The thing that irks me about Brian is that she speaks in dotting terms of all his failures— the lechery that sapped his energy, the laziness that assumed too much. Jade’s reverse mountain psychology has strange quirks— she only dotes on failures that have as their backdrop absolute material success. She loves the rags to riches to (almost) rags scenario, but she notices (and this is the crucial bit to her) Brian is cared for. He won’t starve, struggle, or implode— his material life is secure. Jade loves that for all the motions and maneuvers that have defined Brian’s existence, he’s pretty much the same guy he’s always been. That interior sameness is something I don’t particularly understand— how a human being can develop this sort of negative integrity, and maintain it over long periods of time. But I notice that Jade really does change, and is often stymied by her own alterations. Each new role to play effaces the last; and how many roles can one be compelled to play in one’s life time? Jade, like me, bears the burden of absolute sensitivity— everything lost or gained creates a new mark on an already over-marked consciousness. If Jade has a hard time dotting on me, it’s only because I show her a mirror image as warped, deceptive, and evanescent as the one you see in a circus mirror, that may or may not be moving towards a new height or depth.

### #63

I have the challenge set out before me: to accept my own hollowness, as I watch Jade perform her daily tasks. There is a sense that I am watching a series of multiplications: first Jade is *this* person, then *that* person. All of this signifies that Jade sees my own multiplications when we touch. But if there is no stable center inhering in either of us, who are the two people that fuse their physical energies, in such a way that the world is briefly effaced? Multiplications can be taken two ways— as a destruction of stable centers, or the creation of variegated parts that form coherent wholes. Because Jade needs her drugs more than I do, I feel her desperate edge of a woman hovering above an abyss, a woman who cannot look down. I'm past the point of believing in myself as savior or personal Jesus; Jade must live with her crosses and bang through them on her own. My own cross is the vision of multiplications ending, simply because each ephemeral self expresses the same desires, tastes, fixations, and foibles. Jade and I can't give each other that much— Trish could never teach me this, because our basic, shared presumption was that nothing existed but what we could give each other. As I make love to Jade, there is a charity I feel towards her predicated on her own unacknowledged autonomy— that she has more than she thinks she has. If we persist without knowing yet what our equation is, I know that much of it has to do with shared charity, expressed in a context of basic and final separation and singularity.



## #64

One night, just for amusement, I showed Jade all my mementos of Trish. I have stills of all of Trish's early pictures; shots taken of us on vacation in Montreal (us in the botanical gardens, looking like hippies with Chinese lanterns us); notes Trish wrote to me at different times; and the shirts Trish bought me as birthday gifts. It was funny to watch Jade's reaction; she sees in Trish a vast amount of frost, a frigidity that sullies her beauty. How did I stay with a frigid woman for so long? Maybe it's because I enjoying crashing through ice; maybe I'm a masochist. But it's amusing to me that I never completely acknowledged Trish's frigidity. Perhaps I thought she could be thawed over time. I get a sense in all this of how myths are created and passed along. Is myth the final equation for the human race? Is that the only way information can be passed along? We live in our pasts, we live with the myths that have shaped us, and if there is a place for truth in myths, it is a self-created truth that can hone and separate. In truly lived moments, myths are moot— they are established afterwards to amplify and consolidate these moments. It seems to me that Jade and I are deliberately evading the mythical in our mating— there's nothing to hold, nothing to latch onto. It's just that the persistent ache in our bodies needs to be assuaged; whatever remains of our souls hovers around us uncertainly.

## #65

Some nights I have strange dreams. Vague situations play themselves out in such a way that I'm never entirely sure what happens. Faces drift around me; I identify a girl I used to know, who drifts back into the wilderness; then I see and hear Lisa. I'm watching, from a second-story window, as she plays some kind of game with a small child (to be honest, I don't know where Lisa is these days, she might even have kids). Here voice narrates to me what it was like to be my lover in the old days. I never realized how young she felt, how ill at ease she was with me then. She now excuses herself for her transgressions (and I was certainly one of her transgressions), pleading extreme youth. I was never a secure choice— too much art, too little money. But, as ever, Lisa fails to compel me, and I sense the vulnerability behind her narration— her need, not just to be like everyone else, but to be more like everyone else than everyone else is. I wake up alone, raise the blinds on my windows, and ruminate. I have chosen to live as an artist because I see vast possibilities for truth and dignity in words. Security has always seemed to me to be an unlikely condition for humans and humanity. That could be the reason I'm always willing to fall in love— if you can achieve security within insecurity, you can live with risks, contingencies, separations, anxieties, all the numerals that accrue to our equations. If the relevant numerals accrue to bank-books, stasis will always remain the rule.

## #66

With Jade, I'm beginning to feel these gushes that I can only call love. I'm so overwhelmed by the intensity of the feeling that I transcend my desire to have her physically. It is just because I realize now that Jade actually has nice thoughts of me, nice dreams of me, and actively encourages my happiness. I have come to the startling realization that 90% of Trish's thoughts about me were negative. She hated my art, my discipline, my dedication to creating at a high level; loathed my physical neediness, the way my body took from hers; and would now be happier if I were dead, safely embalmed in my own myths. Jade is too good-natured to fall into these traps; she's mastering her solitude, severing her ties to a society that wants to cast her in a bogus mold, and planting seeds of triumph. It is with my help and guidance that she is doing this, and she is doing the same for me. The equation for us is something up above our heads, some other world, realms of spirit uncontaminated by pettiness, unclouded by fear, untarnished by envy. All the same, I don't entirely trust these gushes; could it just be that I've led a life so enclosed in negativity that I've never really known what love is? At my first brief encounter with genuine love, all my reserves of heart-energy spill out of me harum-scarum, and it is far more satisfying than a sexual climax. The upshot of this is that I feel, for the first time, a sense of impatience with physical consummations; what I want is to bring the worlds, the two gushes, together, in such a way that I can create, with Jade, truly lived moments that take on consonance as true myths.

## #67

The quandary is this: as high up as I fly with Jade, when she leaves I hit a rock bottom base of depression and lethargy. No human being can soar without sinking; no consciousness can be wholly vertical. But as I lurch around, looking for something to occupy my time, I get irritable fits; vertigo replaced by claustrophobia. My nerves are strung to such a pitch that each movement my body performs engenders an ache. This, then, is the terrible clay we are made of; and the incorrigible processes of change wear it down with precise and unyielding force. Yet I feel I can master this; the thought rises that the self-begotten equations of solitude have a brutal finality to them that relationship equations don't— we die alone. Every lover gives us the armor of having been loved; stripped of it, we build our own fortresses against the tide of everything that is not us. The question is whether the armor we gain from having been loved can be used when we are alone; I think it can. But it has to be tweaked so that the different and separate selves we have been become lucid in our minds. As I watch the sun set over Arch Street, what use to seem a fabulously ugly view to me now seems apropos, adequate. The human world is largely ugly; what's redemptive is the landscapes forged in solitude or near-solitude by individuals. If you want to embody this equation, it becomes necessary to embrace the geometry of states of being alone, "single," and the ability to pursue and attain different levels and grades of interiorized fusion.

## #68

If you let your mind wander and hit a vertical patch, it becomes easy to see that solitude and sex presuppose each other's necessity in an examined life. I've just learned, from a reliable source, that a woman (many years back) was taken from me by slander and gossip. It was during one of my promiscuous periods; in the midst of such an epoch, one trots from flower to flower, trying to pick everything, place everyone in one's button-hole. This particular woman was forced by a social context to reject my advances. In my current solitude, I find some richness in having been deprived— it is a reminder that most social contexts are predicated upon fear, insecurity, desperation, desire, and treacherous self-interest. Now, my life has been reduced to Jade-and-I, or I alone. When I do these little phone dishes with figures from my past, I'm stunned to find how easily stung I am, how many situations I botched, people I misread. The verticality of this is all in the realization that it must happen again. No artist can afford to live for prolonged periods above the fray— there is too much in an individual consciousness that flattens out on vacuity if preserved in isolation.

### III. Synthesis

## #69

The crux of the matter is this: it's time for me to jump into some fray again. I'm restless: I know that what you gain in solitude has to be pushed out into the open for there to be some truth consonance, and these peregrinations are not enough. Jade has been bolstering my confidence; but I'm too old to just hit the bars and the clubs like I used to. So I'm poised to do something, I just don't know what yet. Like mathematics, human life has distinct compensations: there is always another equation to be formulated and parsed, a new slant, novel ways of perceiving realities that are leveled and layered to begin with. And, somewhere in the distance, a miracle always hovers: the promise of a few truly lived moments, in which every narcissistic schema is transcended in the sense that something is being given and received on both sides. If I didn't believe this, there would be no reason not to commit suicide, because I already feel I've done enough work for one life-time, and the growth of my seeds has been more than adequate. But because the deepest truths are social, it cannot be my life-path to give up on my own humanity, and everyone else's. I have claimed that these miracles usually transpire in a sexual context, but I have learned in writing this book that this does not have to be the case. Our greatest consonance with reality and humanity is expressed any time something moves in an upwards direction between ourselves and someone else; any equation involving legitimate ascension is one worth investigating.

CHELTENHAM: BLAZEVOX, 2012



# I. Cheltenham Elegies

#261

Never one to cut corners about cutting corners, you spun the Subaru into a rough U-turn right in the middle of Old York Road at midnight, scaring the shit out of this self-declared “artist.” The issue, as ever, was nothing particular to celebrate. We could only connect nothing with nothing in our private suburban waste land. Here’s where the fun starts— I got out, motherfucker. I made it. I say “I,” and it works. But Old York Road at midnight is still what it is. I still have to live there the same way you do.

#412

Each thinks the other a lonesome reprobate.  
That's what I guess when I see the picture.  
It's Elkins Park Square on a cold spring night;  
they're almost sitting on their hands. One  
went up, as they say, one went down, but  
you'll never hear a word of this is Cheltenham.  
They can't gloat anymore, so they make an  
art of obfuscation. That's why I seldom go  
back. Elkins Park Square is scary at night.  
There are ghosts by the ice skating rink.

#414

And out of this nexus, O sacred  
scribe, came absolutely no one.  
I don't know what you expected  
to find here. This warm, safe,  
comforting suburb has a smother  
button by which souls are unraveled.  
Who would know better than you?  
Even if you're only in the back of  
your mind asphyxiating. He looked  
out the window— cars dashed by  
on Limekiln Pike. What is it, he said,  
are you dead or do you think you're Shakespeare?

#421

Huddled in the back of a red  
Jetta, I thought we were in a  
Springsteen song. But there are  
no backstreets in Cheltenham.  
It's only the strip-mall to house  
and back circuit. Anyone could've  
seen us. It wasn't a full consummation—  
for want of a graceful phrase, we  
were too smart to fuck. There was  
no playing hero for me. Nor did I  
force you to confess. What could you say?  
Cheltenham was soft, and all too infested.

#193

Why, as I climb Old York Road,  
the bridge is a foreboding one—  
thousands here hurled from  
pitiless heights, as was decided  
each time by casual stooges,  
whose own eventual, catastrophic  
deaths were not faced by  
themselves or anyone else:  
Kabuki puppet deaths, Old York Road  
another puppet stage.

Past midnight, into the early  
morning: nothing for you to paint  
here. Just that sense, from  
the front seat of an old Volkswagon,  
of what worlds can never change  
for people like us. What soothes  
& slays is the same thing:  
things in real life get stuck,  
for better or worse, & peace  
is all in being willing to stick, too. Right?

#671

Even as a little girl, she got beat down.  
There was something wrong with her brains.  
She couldn't relate to people. Cheltenham  
guys noticed how adorably doll-like she was  
(lookin' real good, like Natalie Wood), but she  
wouldn't date anyone. She died a mysterious  
social drowning death. She got older and  
became a Tennessee Williams heroine-as-Jewess.  
I'm telling you this because I nailed her, dude.  
I got her to give me a blowjob.

#415

There's something sweet and sickly  
about teenagers fucking. Even laid  
down by the jagged rocks that bordered  
Tookany Creek. I think of them there,  
and know he's getting wasted. What's  
draining out of him is the will to live.  
She always gets him off somehow. Then  
they would walk over to the Little League  
field and huddle in the dugout. He didn't  
even wind up graduating from Cheltenham  
on time. I can't get over thinking who he  
could've been. Am I the only one?



#416

It's two in the morning— this big empty field is a vacuum sucked into this little girl's mouth. Everything's little, he thinks. At least I'm big enough to get head. The problem is what she wants from me. And what she's bound to get. Just by chance, someone in a passenger seat in a car going by on Church Road sees the outline of the two figures. One is leaning— the blowjob part isn't visible. Wow, he says; this place is strange. He shakes himself, turns up the music, and gets ready for a long ride.

## #213

You and your proud working-class ethos.  
You, sitting at your laptop, spying on me  
on Facebook, jerking your parts off. Go  
ahead and pass on that shipment: you'll  
get a cut. You're no beauty school dropout,  
hanging around the corner store. You need  
to know: when they do make me into a rag-  
doll, you'll get one of the first batch. You  
can wring me out, slam me down on your  
linoleum floor, bite my head to your heart's content.

#260

I was too stoned to find the bathroom.  
The trees in the dude's backyard made  
it look like Africa. You were my hook-up  
to this new crowd. The same voice, as always,  
cuts in to say you were fucked up even  
then. You had a dooming Oedipal  
complex. We were all wrapped tight,  
even when we got high. I was the  
only one getting any, so you both  
mistrusted me. African trees & easy  
camaraderie. A primitive pact sealed  
between warring factions— my spears  
(take this as you will) for your grass.

You can force your pen into a cat's anus  
for all I care, she told him. October sun-  
light hit the grimy pavement as if directed  
by Rocky Balboa himself. The Art Museum,  
he thinks, is mostly crap but its still imposing—  
what man has made of man, fodder for gift-  
shops. His working life is a gift-shop too—  
no one buys anything. If he did force his  
pen into a cat's anus, they'd probably arrest  
him for animal abuse. Maybe he'll pretend that  
she's a cat. Ring the bell for round two, please.

## #212

Picture this: thirty kids in a two-story house in the Poconos. They're little bandits. Their parents think they're somewhere else. It's the popular crew: but half the baseball stars are homosexuals, half the cheerleaders want to be housewives, and the football guys are putting on five pounds a day. They have to carry little Megan outside for some fresh air; she's drunk, got ditched by a wide receiver. She looks at the mountain stars, thinks (her friend imagines) nothing thoughts about nothing. Eighteen years later: one of the homosexual baseball stars is now at a mountain retreat in the Poconos. He gets carried out by his lover to look at the stars, drunk on Mimosas. Nothing gets thought about nothing again. What do I think? I'm writing a letter to Nietzsche. Ask him.

## #160

Your skin hangs around you like an old lady's loose gown. You used to live a dynamic double life, with constituents coming out of your ass from three schools. No one anywhere knew quite who you were. Now, I hesitate to state anything for the record these guys are recording. The whole process creeps me out. I sat in the back of the Subaru while they egged somebody's house, or he took a handful of CDs from Tower Records, placed them under his sweater or into his boxers. What I tell them is the truth: there was too much in you that you never even knew about. You were a mystery to yourself. You were the kid at the bowling alley trying to hook up with the twins, or the obsessive devotee of another head-case. Now, I'm a head-case who knows the same thing is true about me, and if my skin is tautened it stings.

#448

I was talking to the thin air twenty years ago,  
but I still say it: for all the constituents you had  
coming out of your ass, poke a hole in you,  
there's nothing there. Wall Park that night was  
desolate as ever, the moon bothered to hover  
bemusedly above, all the rest. Out on the four-square  
field of grass which bluntly, flatly dominates  
the stupid place, an act was performed that made  
your life as completely a parody as slamming back  
rancid milk. She seems to have forgotten you, I  
thought. The drive-by guys were surprised, to  
say the least, as was I, drunk on stolen beer. They were, too.

**#418**

I remember thinking: boy do I feel Wild at Heart tonight. What a joke— this horrible Cheltenham bitch with a huge nose tries to generate an orgy in her basement. The pot was alright, at least. But Elkins Park gave us the creeps, and we agreed afterwards never to go back. The fucked up thing about that night for me in particular was knowing we would have fun talking about it forever. And we have, so I guess it's not a complete dead loss. The girl I was with pretended I was fucking her, too.



**I.**

The Junior Prom deposited me (and fifteen others) on the floor of her basement. I could barely see daylight at the time, and at three in the morning I began to prowl. I was too scared to turn on any lights. She emerged like a mermaid from seaweed. I needed comfort, she enjoyed my need. We had gone out— she was bitter. The whole dialogue happened in shadows. No one was hooking up in the other room, either. You spiteful little princess.

**II.**

Whether off the bathroom counter  
or the back of your hand, darling,  
your unusual vehemence that  
winter night, cob-webbed by  
half-real figures, was animated by an  
unfair advantage, which stooges threw  
at you to keep you loopy as you  
died piece-meal. All I had  
was incomprehensible fury and a  
broken heart— when I hit the floor  
at four, you were getting ready  
to play fire-starter, opened  
the little snifter, curled your finger  
twice in the right direction; darkness—

**Addendum: #420**

The craftier angle to hear them: hover  
in the doorway, in total darkness, hands  
held behind your back. She takes a stand  
against him in the shadows, as her lover  
flails, barefoot on carpeting: jabs, another—

these two miserable adolescents, tokens  
of the dirge that was this tepid Philly 'burb,  
clown choruses pining for images, curbed  
words replaced with scripts, minds unbroken  
finally meeting ends in winter rain, soaking,

drenched with venom against the Solid.  
What to look for: register his life-force  
energies against hers, for the first course  
her rhetoric takes against him, her stolid  
defiance, sharply defined, against knowledge

that she's veered over into eerie wilderness.  
It's true, the abyss laughs around her, & him,  
but she's slightly more bound up in it, thinned,  
bruised beneath surfaces to embrace the abyss,  
all he needs is a caress given really, a kiss—

he won't get it. What he'll get is the meaning  
of the surface she's chosen: bone, dust, webs.  
Yet they stand exalted as they taste the dregs—  
someone's watching elsewhere, & scheming.  
Transmutation must happen, past dreaming—

that spirit, against the animal, is real in them.  
The doorway is hinged to show you two souls—  
unvarnished, electric, whether riddled with holes  
or not, & love of a kind is being made, & gems.  
The craftiest angle is not you, if you will, but them—

#702

His heart ached within a drowsy, numbed trance.  
Cameras panned to him pacing the black-top, even  
blackier at 3 am, which opens out on the expanse  
of Mill Road, down the hill, past the school. Night deepened,  
he was lonely enough to cry, heartsick for being  
the only one of a scabrous tribe gutsy enough to say the name  
which even then had rent Cheltenham, riddled  
with bullets like a dog's corpse, assassins fleeing  
the site of the hit, where the one kid, bound for fame,  
did for himself the trick of ditching a tepid middle.

He levitates past himself, flies with bugs into crevices,  
is the pilot of the few airplanes wafting by, Pegasus-like  
for a mind intent on flight, meeting divinity, heaven's bliss  
from a cockpit. Myers' schoolyard glistens like spikes.  
She knew him then, at her end— saw how the spine  
imposed truth on empty gesture, feeling on pretense,  
vital life on the living death of their shared enterprise.  
This, he could never know; yet without knowing how, why,  
he strode past her emptied house that night, tense,  
sweating in summer's stew, pallid in cold surprise.

The apostate flies around a small room, piles of books,  
papers scattered, forests of drafts, faintly heard bird-song.  
Verdurous plains suggest themselves; moss-softened nooks;  
just out of time, to a mind o'er spelled by word-song.  
He can only fly as he reads, over & over, the lays  
already fastened to moss & flower, secured above  
shallow stream. His friend waits, in stealth.  
The early morning ride he caught then, from love  
given, wasn't her— she had gone the way  
there is no coming back— yet he slept himself back to health.

When he drives around Elkins Park in  
the dead of night, he thinks, this is how  
I like the human race— asleep. When three roads  
fork at Myers, he goes down Mill Road.  
By the time the car climbs Harrison Ave,  
he has the thought that the sleeping human  
race is the holy one. He pushes past the old  
derelict high school on High School Rd, wonders  
if its still haunted. It flashes on him: the day  
he broke in, smack in the middle of the Nineties,  
with buddies now long dead. He found a hammer,  
stole it, never used it— it sat in his closet  
until after graduation. He was smashed then, too.

**#419**

She put down the coffee cup and started to tear up. Jesus, you can't even take her to Starbucks. He leaned into his pumpkin scone. The barista was cute, and she was shooting him a look. Myers. He remembered passing it once. There was a glare off the blacktop (or something) that hurt his eyes. So one of her old friends died. They used to hang out there. Etcetera. And now this. The barista herself thought, that callous prick. He's like a little kid.

#268

Satin blouses, trinkets (some kind of  
jade pendant), & the big trinket between  
her legs that nobody gets to play with.  
Rare meat. She's been babied by her  
parents since her birth (Rabbit year,  
a juxtaposition more sad than ironic),  
and suddenly I can teach her something?  
And I thought of what she was telling  
herself in response, and the words came  
to me, "I'm doing this because I promised,  
my Mom wants me to do this, now I promised, I have to do this."

## #507

### I.

The Junior Prom deposited her into a crawl space. He took liberties with her— hands all over the place. Now, she was trapped in a basement with him, the whole gang, there to reinforce the rightness of being top dogs in the class, which they (as she knew) only half were. Like a mermaid from a shipwreck, she rose to lock herself in the bathroom, pill up. He was human seaweed to her, sequestered with the boys on the opposite side of the basement. The crash was heavy— when she woke, it was almost noon, most of the gang gone. They'd spited her.

### II.

They were washed up on a shore. Bonded against an impostor who had briefly been among them (Megan threw a party at his house, when he lived in a rich one), they could only be semi-stooges until they got him out somehow. A hands-on treatment, he thought, is what the situation calls for; I'm the exorcist here. You knew who's being cast out. No huddling in the dugout, no getting him off, no frolicking by Tookany Creek. Me. I'm who you're looking for. He repeated it to himself, even as she slept, far away. The fire of it ravished the basement, awake.

“Do I get to be the Friday night  
Lady in Black? Do I get to molest  
little boys in bunk beds? You can  
take your pathetic baby games,  
give ‘em to your wetback pony friends  
in Shitville, for all I care.” That’s where  
the tape in her head ends, as it is Friday  
night, and she’s going nowhere near  
those sleaze-ball sons of bitches. She  
forces herself to vomit up an ice-cream  
cone. She sends a one-liner out to one  
of her text-lists— she’s wearing a black  
dress in her soul. She has no initials.



#431

They sit at the same pub on Limekiln Pike and reminisce. Have they ever wondered how he feels? They don't realize he's driving past, and looks in and sees them there. He still wants in, and pretends not to. The sun set over Glenside an hour ago. He pretends to his family, always, that he has some where to go, but he doesn't: he just likes to drive. The old crew, the popular girls of '95, are just as senseless, as they drive their minds backwards, he thinks. He's still a virgin, and desperate. The business works the same everywhere.

#427

When she starts at Rizzo's, winds her way around to Easton Road on Saturday night, it's with full control, absolute mastery— here's where Glenside stands, where it's going, here's why. The game continues over to Limekiln Pike— Wawa, Tail of the Whale. Not just the surface, but who's hiding where, with what, & again why. Yet deep in her heart, the ultimate why, life or death in a sense of purpose, remains barren. The spider in the glass case, frozen in the Humphrey's Pest Control window, is to the point— Humphrey's never answers anyway— the spider tells her where the real action is. Then the beauty of it— her sacrifice to/for Glenside— becomes just another heist in the world. Limekiln Pike is too steep to climb.

#429

It's Friday night, and she's going nowhere near those ass-fucking sons of bitches. She forces herself to vomit up an ice-cream cone. If she walks past Burholme Park, of course he'll be there, right there among them. It's not just that she expected more—she banked her whole life on him having a little class. Over at Burholme, they've got splendor going in the grass. Nothing can bring back the casual hours. Though it's past dark, kids are still driving putts. The guys wonder whether they'll get hit.

#512

They told me later; she was afflicted with shortness of breath. I held down what I held down from the portal-way of PNC Bank. When she stepped into Easton Road, I had to object. From the wee hours of a night in late spring, the gauntlet I laid down was the standard one. It's just that my guy at the Glenside Septa Station across the street developed a fixation, because she showed up again a week later, wheezing. Now, I have no choice but to establish: nobody fucked her, OK? I didn't, he didn't, my idiot stepbrother didn't, & you didn't either, you moron. Jesus. You act like you've never seen a blonde before. Now we're short of breath—

**I.**

Out past the Septa station, where Easton Road turns residential, they had Pilot A on patrol last night, & our prize partridge manifested before him in tee & panties. Did he do something? He did. Suffice it to say, the current situation came up, & they confirmed an unholy alliance I need hardly enumerate, except to note that by our standards, he fucked her all night long. The PNC morons still want to say they fucked her, too. The patrol moving in to sub for them claim they've got their cocks out. Meanwhile, the blonde (ours) shifted back to Elkins Park for some reason, so that the Glenside marriage can go on, & won't put her clothes back on before dawn.

**II.**

She likes the ice skating rink, she thinks to herself. She likes Elkins Park Square after midnight— ghouls, goblins. She resents Glenside for turning everything into a porno. That's where, they hear, she is— Wall Park to the Square & back, carrying him around in her guts. Needless to say, they don't like him much here. Somebody left a key bloodstain on a rock by the creek, a razor on a swing. Dark times for her, who tries the two-house life, or, as they call it in Glenside, fucking the zig-zag pig. She pledges allegiance to the zig-zag. He watches her from a distance, wood hidden. Others are more obvious.

**#672**

“That Natalie Wood asshole was just in here, now I have to do clean-up. I want you to know that you can’t just get blowjobs on our watch without bringing in your own clean-up people. This is the last time I’m willing to do this for you guys.”

He shuffles out of there, even more conceited than he should be, he thinks, because he has her house staked out, the whole nine yards, & an in to show up in her room, get real the right way, as she also does, as he’s never done. If it’s not too real for you, he’ll say, pistol half-concealed.

## #494

It's Friday night (Saturday morning), they're going very near her indeed. Having (as they watched) scrawled an oh-so-despairing missive to one of her girlfriends, she stripped down to her panties (they snickered), took too many pills, and was now comatose on a bed that clearly hadn't been made in weeks. What they bothered to ricochet over to Burholme was simple—this one's not a problem. Agree with her, flatter her sense that she's a sage, not a whiner (Cassandra, one of the guys thinks), she'll fuck you all night long, too. They've noticed, from Cheltenham, both here, in Glenside & Elkins Park, it's been a summer of blondes—they all think they're special, want special lives. This one gives the loudest screech, and has (they can't resist) the biggest jugs. Her dude is in the pocket, under us.

## #499

The drive that matters, the money drive, always puts his head (finally) in a groovy place. He's parked in the Wawa lot; the sign's been given, he won't be molested. Good old Heather, Miss F, from a class above him at CHS, just walked in & out without buying anything, in a brown raincoat, so he knows: Rizzo's is in on things tonight. You're not, he knows, supposed to equate dealing with the oneness of the universe, but he does, because, although it's a bit chillier than it should be, he's got his cock out for Heather forever. The pills kicked in. The car's solid. Rizzo's has both of their backs. And, most sublimely of all, he's not needed on Easton Road at all tonight. His racket stays on Limekiln. He'll stay high, in peace, with homeboys here, too. Done.



#573

She had the kid, no one knew— he didn't either, the putz. She was apparently in a Puerto Rican mood. He didn't realize the whole West Side Story enterprise was going on behind his back, and I went crazy, watching the dance spectacle. I can't not think it's funny now, her still sitting on the fence, as if she could look normal there, as if what she does in Center City could still ricochet to us as something that matters. I'm only bringing this up because she was in Jenkintown last night to see a movie, with some other new putz-guy she has around. She gave my scout something to give to me, and I liked it, her being a Jet all the way. We gave her limited privileges with our sheets in Center City. Another putz, or him again, no dance—

**I.**

The spook she was— he suspected, as they rose to leave her, that she'd not only never left Cheltenham, but that she was chiding him personally for not having resolved the general mess in a sanitized package. As they turned onto Easton Road, he finally said what he had to say out loud. Then, he declared himself exonerated— there was no mess for him. He wanted to live in a real action place, one that mattered in the world— he got his wish. The jalopy was spotted from 7-11, headed back towards Wyncote. They awaited her signal, as she rose to leave, which came in a 30% tip, in cash.

**II.**

Church Road back through Wyncote, towards Elkins Park, he had some things to say right back. The real action you were looking for came at a cost, OK? Because now, when we go out, we attract spooks. You don't know what might've happened when we left, but I'm sure it wasn't nice. He stopped, then, thinking of a picture which had become famed in their circle— the pariah and the Amish high priest.

The pariah was their responsibility. The high priest was at the bottom of a bunch of seas. He said, it turned out badly, OK? I want to say, for the record, that your sense of being exonerated is a bullshit one. Now, we're the criminals too. It turned out badly.

Passing, he thought Wall Park laughed at them, as usual.

#529

Knives thrust into wooden tables at the drop of a name— factions squaring off, bedraggling an endless summer— here they sat at the Glenside Pub, securely fastened to life or otherwise, glared down the throats of their enemies, into their lagers. Nick, C.J. and the rest were telling stories. It was Jeremy, they said, who was covered in leeches, like me. I had hijacked his potency, mojo, what have you. Stop midflight, adjust the altitude, right? Spreadsheets held their own knives. Step back, Jack. C.J. towers (he thinks), Nick dazzles (he thinks), puddings' right there, chumps. The blonde (his) leers. Easton Road chokes all over again. He steers.

Knives thrust into wooden tables gave Nick a misty-eyed look— as was later learned, he was stealing again. Too many secret alliances, too many mystifications, Nick that summer was securely fastened to nothing. He was the kind of guy who liked to think of nothing as something solid, himself the master of a solid kind of nothing, manifested by him, whatever spreadsheet was up. A dead duck's a dead duck, dazzling or not. He'll never mistake himself for flesh & blood (invert), never protect himself falsely (invert), never ask how he got to the places he may arrive at. I thought I knew then where he was. But he got caught.

I.

Beheaded? A contestant on Wheel of Fortune, to see how much of his soul he can singe in one night: beheaded? All because I wouldn't save him. Not that it was my responsibility to do so (car turns onto Harrison Avenue, parks). The encampment area at the corner of Harrison & Limekiln shows off, at this time of night, the monstrosity, Glenside Elementary, as an act of architectural vandalism; my miserable wife won't talk to me, at first blood she starts to wheeze, I (the king) can't help her either, because I (the king) am a peon here. It flew off with the first birds of dawn, and with Nick's blood-soaked head on a pike: my soul. Now, for eighteen months, it's gone.

II.

Halfway over the Atlantic Ocean, there it was, affixed to the cockpit's glass to deliver a Lenny Bruce-ian monologue: Nick's severed head. How nice of you to show up, Nick, but I have a responsibility here, these people's lives are all depending on me, so... *the nose knows. What the nose knows, the nose knows, but what you don't know the nose knows, is how you smell to me, and your past smells like ass, for real.* He knows, he's not only not supposed to sweat, he's supposed to manifest nothing but the most masterful ten-hour coolness. He does, but only through years of rigorous practice. His insides are not as numb as they were when the whole sword-blade heist happened; everything in him stews. Glenside Elementary re-delivers to him its terrible news.

## #554

From the angle the bathroom door was left ajar, the Pub crowd knew (it was a flag) someone had fallen. The inside crowd, drunk on heat, wasted on weed, saw the evidence, guessed (correctly) it was Nick. Heat trailed in from Easton Road, numbness built in the crowd, the door was slammed shut, as participants in the madness tried (shakily, achingly) to sleep the thing off, somewhere else. Ricochets from Limekiln Pike, the usual, but with another flag that someone at Wawa was gloating again. Ensigns as the sun went down, but Nick would never be there again. The crowd knew him to be irreplaceable, sans any sense of caring, though others might cry on the inside.

From the angle the bathroom door got re-opened, they laughed, the sunset crew, gearing up for a night of TV, maybe the Phillies. The score was known, yet one of them went for a walk, all the way to 7-11, just to taste something else, he thought. They'd be missing in action for while, that crew, if he read right. He looked across the street at West Coast Video, thought of Nick. He'd been in a room once with Nick, watching a movie. Nightmare on Elm Street? When someone has to end that way... he can't finish the thought. Later that night, he just understands something, about life, about Glenside, about drugs, about all of it, which seems simple but isn't—it can only be good if you stay yourself, like Nick. Amen.

## #501

Tail of the Whale watched him, sitting in the little Honda, outside Wawa, & laughed. She grew even more exuberant when he got to see Heather sashay in & out, attired for an earlier season on a rainy night. This guy, she thought, is one of my brothers, I like to see him around when I can, even if we're two ships passing in the night. She stands in the light drizzle, in the parking lot, smoking a butt, reminiscing to herself about when they all used to meet at Glenside Elementary on sultry days, do whatever in endless summers. She doesn't think, she knows: things go round in endless circles; one of the circles has to be God, right?

#482

Look: we had a guy planted on the Wall Park side of the creek for the entire night. You want to tell us that you can just knock a guy off in front of him, & us, without us getting upset, that's a no can do. You saw him yourself: he's tough, he can take care of himself, he's an OK trooper. But

“We refuse to take dumb risks right now because things are getting bloody, & we chose a side, OK? The extra three hours were unacceptable, so if you want to make it up to us, we'll ask you to do it right here, right now. You spend three hours in our tank, or we cut the lines. And no bitching, & we say who's accounted for, & you don't.”

Later, he stood his ground in a fenced-in courtyard adjacent to Glenside Elementary, for precisely three hours. Department store dummies did their dance, he fended them off like they were dilettantes, which they were. He thought that night there was something metaphysical about what it meant to be *accounted for*. God watched—

#537

Black Rainbow ruled the roost then. That night  
they played in Ambler, we tried to find the Ambler  
Cabaret, wound up at Reed's Country Store in Blue Bell.  
So: Reed's Country Store shows up at PNC to re-divorce  
someone she never married, with Elkins Park tales  
& torments, & we all go down the slippery slope  
towards recaptured virginity. The ricochet receives  
the ring; Wall Park gets to stop & toke up; Glenside  
groans under packages it can only half-carry; we have  
to get our jollies throwing darts at her metaphoric,  
wicker-wrought spread. The Jetta, a manual, got totaled a long time  
ago. Shifting gears: the Broad Axe Tavern awaits— why  
we have a special Manhattan mixed for her, only we know.



## #519

### I.

Drunken antics in the Poconos, the letter dictated itself. They played tennis, when they were little kids. She stopped the game to deliver a speech just to him, for him. This is who we could be somewhere else, she said. This is who we could be here. I had to remind him that he was sitting in a gay bar with a bunch of queers, who were playing their own tennis games. Thanks for that serve, he said. Another winner. We kicked his ass out. So, no more walking through the park and reminiscing, OK? Please remind all the boys that you must ask permission to say sporty things, or sport around with having a straight past. Please.

### II.

Megan was strung out on me, he inscribed. I was a guy she used to fuck, & when we fucked, she got strung out on me. I was a hard case, she was a bunch of rungs above, but she let me string her up nonetheless. She thought I was beautiful. Why it matters, why I sit here writing this, is because I was asleep the whole time, cresting on a wave into nothingness, & I never realized that to be that far into someone has to ricochet internally, & if it doesn't I find myself again to be the head-case I don't want to be. Or maybe the head-case writing this has now wandered into a life as merciless as a slew of fags dissecting Clint Eastwood movies, but remembers the things he remembers.

## #561

### I.

As I watched him fly commercial airliners over the North American continent, try his hand at farming, bide miserable time in Glenside like he'd never left, he was the man who would be king. No one needs to remind us about his developed spine, quick-minded reactions; yet the heart part went missing, & he didn't find it in the cockpit or the hay-stacks. In Glenside, as in all other places, we saw what we saw: if you can't hang, you hang. He was missing when we all finally got high in peace.

### II.

What I learned: the kingdom of heaven is right there in the sky. If you can make a steady course through heaven, no one can hold back the earth itself anointing you king. The chickens & pigs know it, too. The soil knows it. Even good-old deadbeat Easton Road, still as a graveyard at 3 am, knows it, delivers a positive verdict. Somewhere there's a man (that's me) who unites heaven & earth, a hierophant, & the king among hierophants can kick righteous ass shoving the whole enterprise into motion. I am the king who not only hangs in heaven, but can hang heaven up wherever I go.

#413

All piled into the house on Woodlawn.  
They had me do all the old jokes, as though  
I were a wind-up toy. Most of them had  
never been in the house before. It was  
about to be abandoned anyway; but my  
mind still clings to it. I smoked pot there  
for the first time. I got on the road to my  
first hook-up at a party, & I punched a  
Hulk Hogan poster's crotch. Now even  
this pile-up was fifteen years ago. The shed  
in the back was filled with smoke, as were we—

& no one who was there that night, high,  
hasn't been abased. Wisdom has its  
palaces that look more like park benches.  
Youth's privilege is to be in love with  
life. I was in love with life that night, too—  
the crush of strange kids in an Abington  
house, movements towards more weed.  
We sat on a curb and planned more  
mischief. The Universe had some mischief  
planned for us, too. For those of us who  
live on the curb and nowhere else— a requiem.

## #685

Revolution, turmoil, discord— but the economy for those nights, Cheltenham-Abington, was about something you & yours never cared for. If you were us, which you were not, you put having a good time at the top of the economy. North-East hi-jinx, start at the bowling alley on Rising Sun Avenue, back into Cheltenham, pick up the twins, then, of course, it's already time to smoke up. And so on, for the rest of the night. The crest of the wave didn't crash 'til Willow Grove. Crank up WDRE because they're standing right in front of us. We're everywhere. Brixton watches, carrying a guitar. You there?

## II. Other Apparition Poems

#1632

The guy with the hedge-clipper  
had a heart attack at the train  
station and died, that's what they

said. I only saw him a few times, I  
wish I knew more, he had skin  
always tanned, weather-beaten, in

fact that's how I remember him,  
as always looking beaten, but his  
kids were obnoxious, now they

have to move. I'm looking forward  
to seeing who moves in next door,  
because the guy before also had a

heart attack and died. What is it about  
this street, he thinks as he hangs up  
the cell phone; what needs clipped?

#1653

There were three clues placed in his path that night, that were stones in his pathway. The first was a one-life bitch talking about hierarchies of

gender. The second was a minor poet doing histrionics which needn't be enumerated. The third was a brutal rapist that jumped off the Golden

Gate Bridge, but failed to fall all the way down. All these clues led him to sit in coffee-shops, bars, nightclubs, looking for souls to confide in about

that night, how vacant the roads were, how deep the moon was set in heaven. He had waited, just as they said. At the appointed time, he had seen what he

was supposed to see. The problem was, seeing this made him unhappy enough that he walked away from the road and the three clues, never came back. Now,

here he was. The coffee was taken black.

#1672

Poets are boring  
people, she said,  
because they want  
to fuck words more  
than they want to  
fuck. I said, I like  
fucking people as  
much as I like words.  
You're no poet, she  
said, unzipping me.  
I passed on pieces  
of a universe where  
the down places go  
up. When I hurled,  
it landed in a heap  
at her feet. It was  
both red and white,  
together from senses  
of a lost cross between  
us. I sputtered out.  
Is this what you've  
come to, she said,  
spitting. I couldn't  
speak from being  
rolled. I crumpled,  
threw in my hand,  
betted on being home  
by four a.m. Feeling  
rumped, ten-sheeted,  
I gave her tattoo a fling.  
She told me her changed  
plans. It ended in drinks  
poured down like so  
many rain-buckets. I  
was waiting for a charge,  
& when it came, said  
to her, don't fake me  
out, or even try, I see  
your deal, and I'm  
leaving now, to which  
she flamed, blared teal. Abalone.



#1674

I leaned on my dashboard hands,  
propped myself up for the surge,  
sparked as I plugged away, Vulcan  
at a soot-scummy forge, beneath me

Venus thinking of grey pigmentation,  
behind the wheel the music blared, I  
went through the light into the wash,  
but came out more dirty than I was

when I entered: smudged coal, rubber.  
Were we covered? The Venusian you  
were could only jealously repeat what  
you'd already said. More work for Vulcan.

#1163

In the dream I lied, I said  
I wasn't going to make a  
pass, then I cast my arms  
around you (slinky black  
dress), held you close to  
me (wall length windows  
around), we buttered in,  
when I woke I saw you,  
your Polynesian sister, you  
cried in the dream, it wasn't  
you, tears like sea-weed—

#1149

I have always wanted  
to drink your blood;  
all these long years I  
have waited to taste it

mixed in red wine, in  
a silver chalice, quick  
flick of a dagger at our  
wrists, communion of

a dark hue, eye and you—  
ensorcelled to love & die.  
Death between us can't  
not be a kind of feast.

As the next level or layer  
is shed, it's inverse onions.  
I'll keep your blood around  
my neck if you will mine.

#1566

Your voice came through her (I heard it distinctly, how you curl around your vowels), then I knew that the voice you gave me (silvery, icicle smooth) was false, that it had all been a ruse— the deeper layer

is between you two, I'm a cardboard cut-out. I'm a big advertisement for my own rod, not much else, but we've been here for years, with pretenses that these things have to happen, & they don't.

The male as pathetic— the voice with useless grain in it. I want you to see how hungry I am, right? Not just to be in you, but to settle as something concrete in your guts. But the authority is in the icicles.

#1644

“Oh for the sentience of books,  
Kant once said, or should have,  
and if he didn't it is difficult for  
me to accept his critiques, as they  
hinge on acknowledgements of inward  
sentience of beings, and books are  
beings, even as they are-in-the-world.  
As for this, this is action poetry, but  
I have no intention of driving my car  
into a tree, unless I feel the tree has  
so much sentience I would benefit  
from the action, & I don't doubt  
that this could be the case.”

#1059

Bandaged head, nine staves, I'm  
the guy that can take it forever, I  
come up in your reading at the top  
of the cross, drop the staves on your

candle, & as the reading ends: she  
takes the one stave I need the most,  
to tie the thing up, at the crosses'  
bottom— what comes to pass,

unfortunately, is the same silly  
explosion we always come to, as  
the two fools pitch off the cliff,  
nipped at at the heels by the one

you call dog, but who may not be,  
also as usual. The cards' orgasm is laughter—

**I.**

“Fuck art let’s dance”  
only we didn’t dance,  
we fucked, and when  
we fucked, it was like

dancing, and dancing  
was like art, because  
the climax was warm,  
left us wanting more—

how can I know this  
dancer from the dance?  
Brain-brightening glance,  
how tight the dance

was, and the sense that  
pure peace forever was  
where it had to end for  
both of us, only your

version was me dead,  
after I had permanently  
died inside you like the  
male spider always does—

**II.**

Pull me towards you—  
woven color patterns  
create waves beneath  
us, tears buoy bodies

to a state beyond “one”  
into meshed silk webs—  
not every pull is gravitational—  
as two spiders float upwards,

I say to you (as we multiply  
beyond ourselves) “those  
two are a bit much, their  
sixteen legs making love”

#1113

Her money, she repeats to herself, connects her to the whole world. She still sashays into Joan Shepp on Walnut, even if she can't buy anything. The fabrics, the cuts of the dresses— this is who she is.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she knows she's been tossed like a rogue piece of fabric, & the hands that cut her have made her inelegant. To handle this cloth with dishrag hands, is to wade knee-deep into the darkness of the suburbs, frozen like jell-o around her.



#1505

to make love is to be taught,  
over & over again, how far  
into each other we can go,  
but you, who failed my class,  
must be taught, over & over  
again, how to pass into real  
ecstasy (these unholy caresses):  
*wake up, wake up, the bells, the bells!*

& as she glides down Pine Street,  
stars are joined by the moon & sun,  
begin a dance on the shore of  
this corner (13<sup>th</sup>), blue-black,  
orbs wedging crystals between us—

#1503

This I tell you—  
you can live or  
die, a tramp or  
sage, planted in  
sand or earth, I  
will rot in earth,  
still-birthed, blues  
will taste black in  
you, like asphalt.

#540

In the pregnant pause  
between your mouth's  
movement and a gush  
of thick metrics, I had  
a vision of sun-dappled  
red hair that must have  
been yours, because we  
were in a forest. Since it

was 1918, I did not have  
a stun-gun to plummet it  
back to the grungy soul-  
morass from which it hung—  
but the forest's frail pomp  
brought green into mistletoe  
so that the kiss came out kid.

#554

Your game; every moved piece moves me.  
Every dive on/off board is a snap-tailed fish.  
More than ducks & fishes, we are two  
checkered pieces. There is no mate to be  
checked, but a deck to be cut (I say this  
because if I've got game, I've got you, your tails).  
Yet we play in a not-empty stadium, & one  
who watches knows what we're doing. Pieces  
are being thrown onto the field to confuse us.  
All this, as if, right? We're lost; we both lose.  
Or, someone needs to put us back in the ocean  
again, where we can pass for at least half-normal—  
alone together, in pieces ourselves, but game—

#557

Your position's on waves, on  
fish, on the whole question  
of ocean, I said. Especially  
considering your taste for  
red snapper. It was her belly  
that flopped onto mine, in  
such a way that when the  
waves rose, they hit us so  
that the mast held us both up.  
Well, she said, if you threw  
out your fucking metaphors,  
you'd see I was buck naked.

#563

red dress, its  
that, *that*, pink,  
filtered, light, in  
coming, through,  
hasty, embraces,  
bread, thrown,  
square, what's,  
breasts, blues,  
at least, I half,  
drool, ruthless—

#543

Yes, I say, you can have this sweat  
being exhaled as when I loitered  
nightly for a kiss, but could taste  
a little phlegm; but you don't hear.

I'm sad as it's like a dream in which  
we can't touch. I strike in mad trance,  
knife unsheathed, plunged down  
the throat of your bed. Waves of sweat:

look, I say, you just got fucked but  
not over; almost, at least, as though  
we were eighteen again, dry humping—  
bodies metaphor for a realer reality.

#544

I'm learning  
that the taste  
of shit is  
spiritually  
rewarding,  
because  
humility is  
endless,  
your cunt  
really isn't.



#1194

my life is so insane, I live  
on a thin silver edge like  
a crescent moon—

it is necessary we fight  
for things not naturally  
given, or provisionally—

we reconnect our nerves,  
blue, red, multiple streams  
run between us, nothing

left to say, as we pierce  
into animal existence on  
a freeway's rapid dawn—

#1489

campus: she's in an  
elevator, mascara-face,  
beady blue eyes, clothes  
emphasize her figure; she  
is being told about "illicit  
sex with Julia" in a classic:

*she saw it  
happen, wants two razors  
to slash our wrists, we got  
away with it (it was obvious,  
SO obvious)*

behind accents  
that scream North-East Philly,  
I derive this lesson: if you've  
got to fool around, at least  
kill an idiot in the process.

#537

She is far gone into her own un-nested sense  
of being done. I can't go on as one, she said;  
deep dirt is dredged from depths of us, can't  
be kissed. She left her regrets. I tied one on.

How it ends: tied to an old oak, because what's  
in the ground is solid (as only death can be).  
I'm the muck by the riverbanks before the trees.  
But this landscape is surreal, grey, the wrong way.

#1131

She goes to a lake, thinks of me there,  
looks into copses, breathes in forests,  
sleeps in log cabins, picks flowers, early  
autumn quivers, & waits to be told

by sprung nature what she already  
knows; there's no getting out of this  
one, for either of us— not this love.  
It's just that the ideals are now laid

to rest, of who we could've been  
all around, as the decent citizens we  
wanted to be. Mauve sunrise, exquisite,  
that's in the bank; but we know now

what isn't; & the bank's composition.

#1144

The truth of things  
is a snuff flick; each  
day we are impaled  
and impaling, razor  
sharp, red-spattered,  
phantom yellow eyes  
peeking through bed-  
room windows; this  
angle is, if our doors

were cleansed, much  
more ultimate than  
graces and angels;  
the truth of blood,  
subtle destruction,  
everyone implicated,  
everyone culpable.

#1246

God is an amusement park  
(among other things) filled  
with rides, clowns, hot dogs,  
beer, circus mirrors, bearded  
ladies, strong men, log flumes,  
curious tourists (who have  
flown here all the way from  
Vermont), jaded locals (who  
sit in corners, smoking), and,  
ultimately, commodity-crazed  
business men, who honestly  
think they believe, live on  
their knees, yet cast twenty-  
foot arms into multiple pockets.

**#1229**

The encounter-poem came like this:  
she came at me with a genital-jab, then  
an uppercut aimed at my intellect, sucker-  
punched my art and, when I was prostrate,  
fished me out of my pants, rode herself silly.

#1200

She asked me how I did it,  
I turned my arm over, said  
look at these veins, I write  
with them, they are a well,  
she said well that's all very  
dramatic, but those veins  
should be used for life—

if your blood is working  
double-time, your heart will  
only get half of what it  
needs. She hurt me, I said  
leave my blood alone, you  
can never understand, but  
her full house beat my flush—



#1575

This is a dominant stream, meant to  
flow through minds with channels I  
can tweak— think of yourself as you  
might stand before seven cups, point  
only if you must, but shrouded girls  
with raised arms, jewels, castles, and  
snakes may be better guides, I'm just  
the hollowness of sea-shells, in which  
you might hear how forces wave into  
flesh, what roars come from salt-water—  
the man recedes, the over-soul ascends.

#539

So much richness reduced to a book taken  
from this shelf. All passion conduced to no  
end but what exists in her mind alone, truth  
burned off in erratic myths she made up to

make off with a piece of my cake. So easy to  
make her break, if I cared enough to try, yet  
there'd be no reason why I should, after eight  
years. She took it off: it was here. It's nothing.

#1142

Desperation is the need  
to be loved sans reason,  
& I can't stop you either,  
so I'll be happy to watch as  
you dig a grave of ignorance—  
someday you'll hate me, but  
I have no other way to love—

she crawled down the stairs  
at 4 a.m. to smoke a Marlboro  
Red in peace, out on the porch,  
knowing tomorrow she'd  
outshine those dimwitted stars,  
cracked & fractured from  
overuse, in a pie-high sky—

#1570

To wake in darkness  
with a voice you can  
hear as hers— sense  
fiery angels spraying  
colors on two nude  
bodies— I'm hung  
on angels' wings, my  
mind vacillates, what  
happens does so as I  
bifurcate between her,  
angels, as I channel this  
tableaux she absorbs into  
a test she passes me on.

#1631

Teeth, I tell her, not really  
talking to myself, are what  
make stars real, you either  
have them or you don't, sink  
yours in (she does, meeting  
my lineage in tongues), but  
she's not listening, as she carries  
millions in images that heave  
all around her torso. I marvel.  
Nothing coy, just this collection  
of pristine atoms that heave,  
this wet goddess. We make  
love past the millions twice.

#281

A small unframed painting  
of a many-armed Bodhisattva  
hangs over the bed where  
you imagine us wrapped, rapt  
I do not deny this rapture  
I make no enlightened claims  
I have no raft to float you  
Hard as it is for you to  
believe, no mastery came to  
me when this thing happened  
I have two arms, no more  
I am only marginally sentient  
I cannot save you or her  
The painting is better than us  
you're welcome to it

#102

Because I fucked you too, dear,  
I happen to know you're frigid. But I  
never saw you build a Bible out of bad  
sex, or proselytize your botched attempts  
at self-destruction before. Don't you  
think I look like James Dean? Aren't I  
sufficiently tortured? This leather coat,  
my cycle, all the accoutrements of urban  
hipster-ness; this is where I end, not with  
a bang but with a whimper. Kill or be killed, sister.

#112

It's company of flesh and blood  
I need, your blonde head beneath,  
pillows scattered around us like  
confetti, memories of loneliness  
suddenly quaint as "thou," your  
feet in the air like hung mobiles,  
all the thousands of words left  
behind in throats overtaken by  
cries (awe before near-extinction),  
but you are not here, you are  
just a lack, something scrawled  
on a series of sheets, useful  
only to tell me that words have  
holes in them where nothing fits.



#238

If she drinks herself  
to death in London,  
I'll cry like a bourgeois  
runt, I said. It's not just  
that you're dead— the  
kind of discipline that  
might affix itself (bourgeois  
runts have a bias towards  
life) to shots is— she  
chewed me out about this—  
wait, what did she say?

#271

“Never forget: Cleopatra had a big nose, an ugly mug, took accidental drunken shits in bed. How do I know this? Because I was there!”

It's not just he's insane, he knows I have a big nose too, and all this just because he saw an ex crossing the Walnut Street Bridge, her nose

up in the air where her legs used to be. How does he know this? Don't ask.

#147

I keep imagining Abington at night.  
The sense in the air is this: we can't  
be as far down as we are. The guy  
tending bar here (in this dreamed-  
of place) is an old friend; his angle  
on the world is, always, satire. But  
satire depends on people being willing  
to laugh. And if I still sit in my car in  
the parking lot of Abington High leering  
at girls, I can still laugh at that too.  
The Dairy Queen on Limekiln Pike  
remains the same. The girls still like  
ice-cream in the summer-time, right?

#148

Everyone knows she has about two years to live. The blonde babe who runs shipments sits smoking at the Esquire Bar with a guy who still has the rat-tails he had at Cheltenham. How do you behave when you have two years to live? Well, you might try making your body a weapon. You might bop around shaking your hips so that no one might touch. Or fellating the pickle which comes with your sandwich. You might. But as you dance on nothingness, someone watching you is also watching his watch.

#149

“They pulled a gun on him at the diner down the street. He was halfway through his burger. The Greeks who own the place didn’t care. They got bought off a long time ago. I eat there for free sometimes. He probably eats there for free too. They don’t play sides, that family. So if you want a place that’s your place (as we used to have), you better have more money than the other guys, which we don’t anymore. And it’ll take you a year to nail this guy too.”

#151

Last time they met, she kept  
spitting on the cement outside  
the bistro like a sailor. A unique  
composite, I thought as I heard  
this, of two temperaments that  
just can't bite on earth. She keeps  
(he said) her panties on in bed.  
What did I tell him? I didn't. I  
spit on the cement outside the  
ship we happened to be sailing on.  
To spit: an abstract gesture, of  
the kind popular in the arts sixty  
years ago; it counts as "action" now.

#152

“There is nothing shielded here,  
only once things are held within,  
interiors become future shields,”  
yet we can only employ shields where  
the past is concerned. I happen to  
know the visionary deadness which  
permeates these images is too murky  
to give us any kind of present shield, & that  
means you too, darling, artist as  
ripe for decay as a February bramble,  
a tree in early March, this my garden,  
this gallery engulfed in a whirlpool—  
in falls Heidegger, back out again.

#159

Things is tough. I need a break, pal.  
He threw the mitt and softball into  
the back seat of the station wagon.  
He thought of stopping at the Esquire  
Bar at Five Corners. The gang was  
going elsewhere, but he needed a break.  
They kept saying things to him about  
his wife. She wasn't just a little hoity-toity,  
but a psycho hose-beast. He thought he  
was moving up in the world. He stood by  
the station wagon. Everyone had left. It  
was the end of the goddamned season,  
too, he was married, a kid on the way,  
and he knew himself for a corpse. As  
an airplane flew over, he wished he had  
just jumped out of it. Things is tough.



#158

A piece of road kill on the New Jersey Turnpike, scuttling into the city to steal from the old West Philly co-op, to cook lentils over a fire in woods somewhere near the Pine Barrens, this woman who deserted me for a man who could and has brought her three things: no children, abject poverty, and sterling marijuana. It's to be smoked as no last resort but as a means of being so wired into walking deadness that living out of an old Celica seems celestial as a canto of Byron's, perhaps the one she used to recite to me— "tis' but a worthless world to win or lose," and believe me, baby, you don't know the half of it, but you're not listening, you're stoned, you always were, oh the charm of you.









